

Three Key Words: Political, Movements, Social
Media

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Graphic Design

Word Count: 2,497

Ian Simmons

A short context to this writing is to explore three words with the support of images and practitioners. I will connect the three words of Political, Movements and social media to form a question for my independent research document.

Political

“Be sure you put your feet in the right place, then stand firm.” (Lincoln, A)

Politics covers a wide range of information across the world and graphic design plays a big part in it with many designers being able to impact society with their designs and making the right or wrong choices. Political graphic design is everywhere: in elections, protests, memes, and many other places and with the use of the current day social media, any piece of graphic design can be shared across the world instantly, this is known as going ‘viral.’

The biggest place to see the political graphic design is protests and a good example of this and something going viral on social media is a placard of Donald Trump and Putin kissing, which was originally a mural on the side of a Lithuanian restaurant. “The mural was painted by local artist Mindaugas Bonanu. It swiftly gained attention in the media.” (Harris, 2018)



Figure 1 (Bonanu, 2016)

The idea came to the artist because of the shared compliments the two had exchanged: "He is very bright and talented man." (Putin, 2015) and "highly respected within his own country and beyond". (Trump, 2015) in response to Putin.

The kissing position is a “riff on the famous 1979 photograph that showed Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev and East German President Erich Honecker locked in an embrace. That image showed the two men kissing on the lips, once a form of fraternal greeting between socialist leaders.” (Harris, 2018.) As both have been classed as not supporters of the LGBT+ community, using the once familiar greeting is against them is quite ironic. Although there is plenty of graphic design in detest of politicians there is some in support of them:



Figure 2 (Fairey, 2008)

This poster was designed by Shepard Fairey for Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, there are also other variations where the word hope is replaced by 'change' or 'progress.' The poster was inspired by social realism and a photograph of JFK.

Widely considered to be a pop-cultural phenomenon, this iconic portrait of Barack Obama caught the attention of millions during the historic 2008 presidential campaign. The renowned poster was designed by Los Angeles-based, contemporary street artist Shepard Fairey. (Scott, 2017)

But with politics there are going to be opposite sides exploiting your art, with parodies of the posters named 'anti-Obama' which replaced the word 'Hope' with 'Hype.' Which I believe means that Obama gets 'hyped up' and will not meet people's expectations and what he says is 'hyped' to make him sound better.



Figure 3 (Bristol Street Wear, 2017)

Another example of support of a politician is the Corbyn Swoosh by Bristol Street Wear, it portrays how moments of political and social change have a stance on design trends.

Corinna Gardner, the keeper of the V&A's design, architecture, and digital department, said the Corbyn logo on the garment was "inherently digital in its translation of online culture and memes into material form [and] enables us to ask questions about the role of data and social media in the recent election campaign. (The Guardian, 2017)

Petter (2017) writes for the Independent and comments on the even and writes about how it was a strong statement to support Corbyn and the Labour party. The T-shirt was released in the lead up to the general election and fans of Corbyn were seen wearing the T-shirt at rallies, festivals, and concerts. The T-shirt even symbolizes the younger voters and the fact that this cannot be seen in previous elections.

Bristol Street Wear, which donated the T-shirt, said: "It's great to see the typically dismissed art form, 'bootlegs,' given pride of place at the V&A. This T-shirt spoke to so many people. It was immediate, it was fun, it started debates, it was censored, and it even got us into trouble – everything good art should." (The Guardian, 2017)

But this is not the only thing Corbyn has been seen in graphic design and is not the only thing that an artist has connected Corbyn to a younger audience:

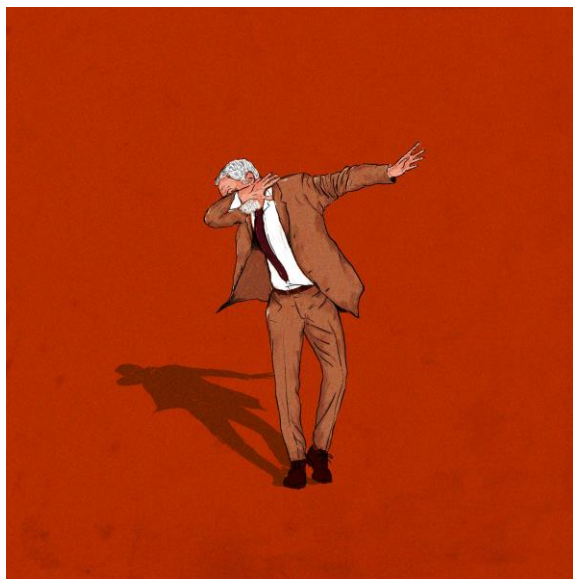


Figure 4 (Dangoor, 2016)

Harris (2018) writes on DigitalArts about this piece of work was taken from a selection of doodles by Reuben Dangoor called "Jermyer Corbyn Dabbing." Dabbing was an internet trend set by younger audiences and became an international sensation and this piece of work by the artist was a response to the political happenings in 2016, the beginning of Trump and Brexit. It was also about how graphic design can be mixed with an internet trend and was a way to connect with younger audiences that are more used to picking up trends they see and recognizing what is becoming popular.

Although I personally like this piece of work and do think it connects politics with the younger generations, many people online did not share this opinion and mocked Corbyn for this illustration. But this did not seem to faze Corbyn as he dabbled in the Prime Minister's question time in February 2017. (The Sun, 2017)

Movements

Graphic design comes in many different variants, it is not always about the drawing or print, some graphic designers take to the world with the art and for worthy causes too, many designers use their talents to raise awareness for issues happening in the world.

For example, this graphic design work by Molly Gochman called 'Red Sand Project' and it was to raise awareness about sex trafficking, she created cracks to represent the boarder of the US and Mexico, to symbolize the fragility of sex trafficking victims. "According to the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking, sex trafficking is a \$32 billion industry, and the numbers show that there are more slaves on our planet now than ever before in human history." (Jones, 2015)

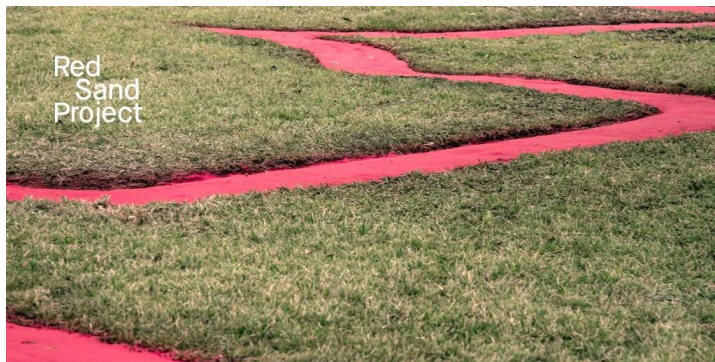


Figure 5 (Gochman, 2014)

The Red Sand Project (2015) states she started in Miami where she would fill in cracks of the pavement with red sand, it was symbolic, and the grains of red sand represented the individuals who "fall through the cracks" and those cracks represented the holes in our social, economic, and political systems. Gochman expanded the project by launching her website which offered Red Sand Project toolkits which participants could receive and take part in the cause as well as start discussions on the topic. "Today, Red Sand Project actions have been done in all 50 states and in 70 countries, with more than one million participants." (Red Sand Project, 2015)

"We can't merely walk over the most marginalized people in our communities—those who fall through the metaphoric cracks." (Gochman, 2015) graphic design is a fantastic way to raise awareness for a movement, it grabs viewers' attention and makes them start a conversation about the topic at hand, but it does not always have to be interactive and a good example of that is "Je Suis Charlie."

A simple black and white slogan that was posted on Twitter that read "Je Suis Charlie" which translates to "I am Charlie" and it was thanks to the power of social media that caused this artists work to go viral: "Not only was it used 1.5 million times that day and about six million times over the next week on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook" (Devichand, 2016)

It represents free speech and the reason this was provoked into creation was because the office of the satirical magazine, Charlie Hebdo, was the target of a terrorist attack as two brothers stormed into their office and killed 11 of the staff. The magazine had been described to be left-wing racials and their articles would include the right wing, religion, politics, and culture. The attack was an attempt to silence this company of its right to comment and be satirical towards these subjects hence why “Je Suis Charlie” became a statement of free speech.

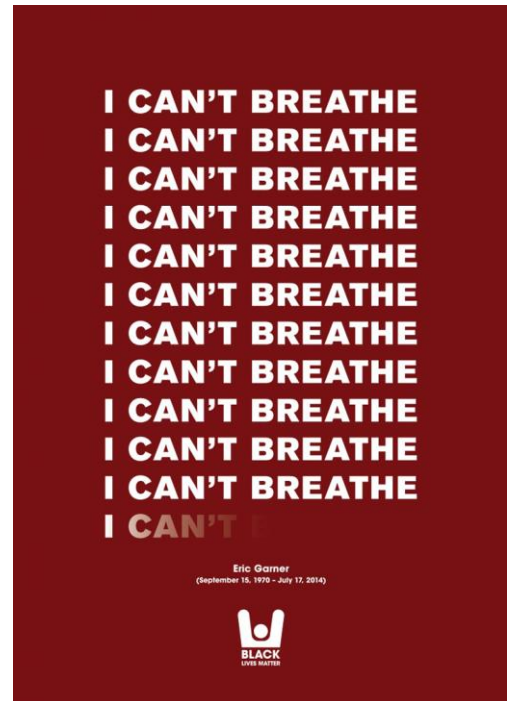
The famous slogan was created by artist, Joachim Roncin and was first posted to twitter which is where it first went viral with its users raising awareness by using the hashtags #jesuischarlie and #iamcharlie, it reached even to the company itself “The website of Charlie Hebdo went offline shortly after the shooting and when it became live again, it had Je Suis Charlie on a black background.” (Harris 2018)



Figure 6 (Roncin, 2015)

As seen and proven multiple times, graphic design is vital to spreading awareness and spreading the message of any movement and that mixed with social media is what fuels the fire that already burns so brightly as so many people become aware so quickly and widespread the news to fight for justice for any movement. “A video which highlights Tweets from the past week, with the hashtag #JusticeforGeorgeFloyd has been watched almost 6m times.” (Wong, 2020)

Specifically, graphic design can be immensely powerful for the movement BLM (Black lives matter) for example, Eric Garner was killed by a police officer when being restrained in a choke hold where he can be heard, on video footage, saying “I can’t breathe” eleven times and due to the widespread of this footage, his words became a slogan for the Black Lives Matter movement, Greg Bunbury, a graphic designer, used this footage to create a piece that repeated the words eleven times and the last line



fades towards the end which suggests the losing of his breath.

Figure 7 (Bunbury, 2014)

So, what does the spread of awareness for movements using graphic design do? It does not solve the problem, but Bunbury says, “make for an environment where there is a desire to solve these problems.” (Wong, 2020) graphic design cannot solve a structural problem but it can start conversations. Political graphic design can be seen as “basic,” but this is because its goal is to cut through the noise and target the heart of the issue. “If I can put three words and make people visibly uncomfortable then I’m doing my job,” Bunbury says” (Wong 2020) as a graphic designer, I admire this quote because, especially, political graphic design should make people uncomfortable because nobody should be comfortable with the issues going on in the world today.

Social Media

The dynamic has changed between artist and audience, thanks to the internet and social media,

New spaces and systems for graphic communication now exist, integrating images and text in two-way conversations that make users part of the process no longer simply recipients of information. Facebook posts, Twitter feeds, 4chan, Snapchat and Instagram may be virtual environments, but their pervasiveness and influence have had a profound impact on the physical world.

(Baker, 2018)

Although this does not mean the traditional media of graphic design, posters, slogans, and banners, are now irrelevant but it does mean it sits alongside the new era of the pairing of graphic design and social media. Whatever the format or medium, whether slogan T-shirt, placard or meme, the strong protest graphic stands out because its message grabs the attention quickly. As Roberts puts it:

Whether held high in protest, fly-posted to a wall or glimpsed on a phone, posters, banners and memes are all a form of visual shorthand. They need to communicate at speed, catching the eye, sparking the imagination – and are often highly targeted. (Roberts, 2018)

Overall, graphic design plays a crucial role in social media, aside from the political side, viewers of brands will demand more real-time and interactive media. Advertising, banners, website visuals all require graphic designers, and it is essential for user experience and although some may think that social media will diminish graphic designers, it opens more doors for graphic designers to work with and makes them more crucial to brand successes.

With the use of social media and the accessibility for posts or messages to go viral, it becomes so easy for politicians to reach out to millions of people without any effort or money and it allows individuals to share their point of view to their viewers, which is what the share and retweet functions are used for on social media applications.

Thought Co (Murse, 2019) writes about social media applications will have an analytics page where the users can view their demographic and most campaign pages are run by professionals as allowing a politician to send out unfiltered tweets or Facebook posts has landed many a candidate in hot water. “A good example is Anthony Weiner, who lost his seat in Congress after exchanging sexually explicit messages and photos with women on his Twitter and Facebook accounts.” (Murse, 2019)

An example of a politician going viral is Barack Obama, his campaign spread over social media very quickly and reached the younger viewers, so much so that a Facebook group was created based on Obama and students: “A Facebook group called “Students for Barack Obama,” for instance, spread to eight campuses and began to operate much as a campaign would with coordinators for various roles including finance and blogging.” (Jasper, 2019) It generated so much attention to younger voters for Obama, that it could be pointed out that that was the reason he won 66% of the youth vote that year. “66% of those under age 30 voted for Barack Obama making the disparity between young voters and other age groups larger than in any presidential election since exit polling began in 1972” (Rosentiel, 2008)

Using social media is the most crucial way to reach your younger audiences, they are the future and what you say to them will stick with them, to make them knowledgeable about elections, it is good for candidates to reach out to them through social media and be an educator. Print Mag (Sayej, 2018) writes how 90% of people check their phone within three minutes of receiving a text message which should be used to their advantage. Sharing people that are excited to vote for them and to reach millions of people about what your goals are is essential, including showing the hype around your campaign and having a graphic for supporters to share and use on their own social media pages. “Ghanem agrees. “I think political campaigns will be moving more and more toward creative text message marketing and social-influencer video marketing,” she said.” (Sayej, 2018) and as a graphic designer, I agree, graphic design is everywhere and with current day technology and social media, it is only becoming more vital for generations to learn.

In conclusion, graphic design plays a key role in the world of politics and with the assistance of social media it allows graphic design based around political movements to go viral and reach an audience that may not be well versed in politics or a specific movement. With the support of practitioners to support

my research, I can conclude that graphic design is a key tool to start conversations based around politics, world issues and movements.

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