

Essay Title – Can Graphic Design Really Save Your life.

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Can Graphic Design really save your life?

Explore the association of wellbeing and personal growth in design. In your discussion focus on a maximum of three specific areas.

The aim within this essay is to explore and develop an understanding of how graphic design may be used to save lives during the Covid-19 pandemic. The simplicity of the question ‘can graphic design really save lives?’ is aimed to provoke the audience into thinking of the deeper meaning behind graphic design in a social context (Ali, 2017). Simple graphic designs guide us through our everyday lives without us even noticing from directional signs, road signs and even branding, influencing their target market in a negative or positive way. We all perceive things in different ways, although graphic design may impact our lives more than we know.

During the year of 2019, the Covid-19 pandemic transformed many people's lives. 'The whole world had to adjust to a new situation and learn to live differently, with restriction' (Vladimíra Jurišová, 2020). Graphic designers had a key role of delivering vital information in a time of need. 'We live in a world where information is arriving faster than we can process it' (UNSW Sites, 2020). During this time everyone was scared, confused and at loss, with lives being turned upside down. Everyone had to adapt to live in new and daunting conditions, guiding each other through this uncertain time.

Throughout this essay we will explore whether graphic design impacted the safety of lives throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. In what way was graphic design able to influence the general public of the United Kingdom to be safe during a global pandemic.

Graphic design played a crucial role in maintaining communication during the COVID-19 pandemic, through posters, campaigns and infographics. 'An infographic is a collection of imagery, data visualizations including different types of charts and graphs like pie charts and bar graphs, and minimal text that gives an easy-to-understand overview of a topic (Nediger, 2023). As the Covid-19 pandemic grew, delivering the correct information to the general public became an essential part of the graphic design industry. Graphic designers became responsible for communicating key information in a clear and easy way. Infographics developed and were used throughout the pandemic to share information in a way that the audience could trust. It can be said that 'We often judge the authority behind the infographic—and how trustworthy the data is—[based on what the infographic looks like](#)' (UNSW Sites, 2020). This included vital elements such as 'colour, slickness of design and logo' (UNSW Sites, 2020). It can be said that the aesthetic of each design used within this

duration could sway the viewers judgement, regardless of the momentousness of the message or information it was requiring.

‘Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, one message became ubiquitous: “Flatten the curve.” (GROW magazine, 2022). This campaign followed an infographic chart showing the cases of Covid-19 at a peak, compared to what they could be as a result to the public following government orders. The message ‘spread far’ (GROW magazine, 2022) as it reached ‘over a million hashtag handles on social media platforms’ (GROW magazine, 2022). The infographic was said to be a success in delivering information people felt was reliable, ‘proving the power a of a simple, strong visual message’ (GROW magazine, 2022). The chart was said to ‘become the visual mantra that defined the initial pandemic response’ (GROW magazine, 2022). The feedback from the visual communication became a huge success in one aspect of helping inform people about the virus. In a sense, the chart was there to advertise trust to the frightened public during this unsettled time and allow them to dive deeper into the understanding of the statistics resulting from the virus through a clear visual. The message behind the ‘flatten the curve’ infographic ‘allowed people to form a more informed decision without relying on trust’(GROW magazine, 2022). Including an infographic at this time allowed people to feel more at ease and showed vital information in various forms of design. ‘The infographic that has become the defining graphic for the COVID-19 pandemic, with its own hashtag, is the “Flatten the Curve” graph.’ (UNSW Sites, 2020).

Image 1 is an example of an infographic chart used during the 2019 pandemic. It is an illustrative visual graphic design excluding any form of text. This example is a simplistic visual with no real data, yet because of its simplicity and graph structure it could be said to be a trustworthy communication. This infographic is said to be an example of a ‘rhetorical’

(UNSW Sites, 2020) representation of graphic design. 'Using rhetorical figures helps to play with the meaning of the images going beyond a literal meaning.' (TOTE studio, 2023). Using an infographic, excluding text or simplifying the visual communication can be said to 'help convey more sensations and give new meanings through the senses, in order to attract the attention of the viewing public' (TOTE studio, 2023). 'Studies have shown that when we can remember something easily, we are likely to trust it more (this is known as 'the Availability Heuristic')' (UNSW Sites, 2020). Image 1 is an example of these techniques combined to create a clear responsive graphic design, clear to understand that the audience can connect with. The aim behind using graphic design during the Covid-19 pandemic was to elevate the response of the public and to get vital information out into the world in an easy and effective way. This graph can be seen as an example of allowing the audience to delve deeper into the meaning of graphic design, proving a simplified infographic can have a meaningful impact in society. Using typography, photography, infographics and more can help 'enrich' (TOTE studio, 2023) the audience and communicate information in a 'persuasive way and often emit a new meaning through a visual rhetoric' (TOTE studio, 2023).

Image 1



‘An infographic showing medical workers working to flatten the curve to slow COVID-19 infection. Image: Shutterstock.’ (UNSW Sites, 2020)

Graphic design played a significant role in supporting mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic by helping to communicate messages of emotional support, resilience, and coping strategies in ways that were visually engaging, accessible, and effective. The pandemic created an environment of heightened stress, isolation, uncertainty, and anxiety, and graphic design helped provide comfort, foster community, and encourage mental well-being. It is stated that ‘Graphic design, is a powerful visual communication tool’ (Garg, 2024) that has a ‘key role in mental health awareness’ (Garg, 2024). The covid-19 pandemonium left many people stuck at home, feeling disconnected from society and lonely. With this came an uprise in social media platforms with people connecting through Zoom, TikTok and many

more social media platforms. 'There was a lack of physical contact from family, friends, and colleagues' (Garg, 2024), which lead to people's mental health dropping. 'Many people were experiencing fear and got stressed to the point of losing it and developing different types of mental illnesses' (Garg, 2024). Evidence proves that the mental wellbeing of people around the United Kingdom was at a low during the pandemic. Restrictions that were put in place were said to have 'significant effects on overall daily living' (Garg, 2024).

Graphic design was used in many ways to help people during this time. Although there were visual communications around during this time that were there to warn people and raise awareness for the danger of the virus, graphic design also played a huge part in helping people feel connected and reassured. Graphic design was used to 'promote understanding' (Garg, 2024) of the challenges people were facing with mental illness, using 'inclusive imagery, positive messages and real-life stories' (Garg, 2024), all to engage the audience and show them that they aren't alone. 'Graphic design can help break down by challenging negative and promoting representations of mental health' (Garg, 2024). Animations, infographics and educational programmes were set in place to 'break down the stigma, challenge and inspire action' (Garg, 2024).

The use of social media increased dramatically from the first lockdown in 2020 (Cho et al., 2023). It is said that 'social media had both a positive and negative effect on wellbeing during the covid-19 pandemic' (Cho et al., 2023). After examining the results from this time, it was indicated that the 'mixed findings' (Cho et al., 2023) were valid. 'Negative consequences like negative social comparison, depression, and psychological stress' (Cho et al., 2023), were all factoring effects that developed throughout 2019-2020. As social media

was such a huge part of people lives in 2020, graphic designers found it the easiest way to reach people.

Graphic design came into place to help people understand mental wellbeing and show people that they are not alone, through the comfort of their own social media platform. 'It is in the digital or real-world principles that well-being is essential' (Garg, 2024). Graphic design visuals were set to find people on social media platforms, online and other technology formats.

The campaign 'Jed Foundation's Love Is Not Enough Campaign' was a campaign of 'powerful images and messages to raise awareness of suicide prevention' (The Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention for High Schools, n.d.) and was 'established in 2000' (The Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention for High Schools, n.d.). This campaign had a huge impact during covid-19 as it was targeted to youth students. 'The campaign encourages young people to be aware of mental illness and have a safe place to turn to' (The Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention for High Schools, n.d.). The campaign includes social media involvement through infographic charts, colourful visual designs and clear branding.

In image 2 we can see a poster design used within the campaign which was a visual used on social media platforms. The colours and typeface within the visual are clear and easy to read. Each element of the design can be suitable for social media content, including a logo allowing the content to seem 'trustworthy' (UNSW Sites, 2020). This is one of many examples of how graphic design was used to share information and help people with mental wellbeing during this time through the world of social media. 'As we continue to face the

mental crisis, using graphic design to raise awareness will be increasingly important.’ (Garg, 2024).

Image 2



(The Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention for High Schools, n.d.)

Graphic design was everywhere during the Covid-19 pandemic situated through campaigns, posters, advertisement and more. The campaign in image 3 is from the official HM government and NHS campaign. This visual communication had a huge impact during this time. ‘Are you doing all you can to stop the spread of Covid-19? Would your answer be the same if you were looking into the eyes of a dying Covid-19 patient?’ (Magee, 2021). The message on the government campaign which followed great controversy during this time.

This ad was said to 'mark a significant shift in tone from its previous communication.'

(Magee, 2021). This advert, created by 'MullenLowe' 'features close-up facial shots of Covid patients, doctors, nurses and healthcare assistants who are wearing surgical or ventilation masks, and asks you to "look them in the eyes" and tell them you are staying at home'

(Magee, 2021). This campaign was released to engage with the public in a more 'personal'

(Magee, 2021) way. It is said to 'encourage viewers to take personal responsibility for their actions and how they affect others'(Magee, 2021). This technique reached millions

throughout the United Kingdom and became a vital visual communication during this time.

'It plays on the identifiable victim effect bias'(Magee, 2021). The form of visual

communication throughout this campaign became airy and cut throating. The campaign was a strong example of how a graphic communication can provoke an audience.

The idea behind this visual was to engage the viewers and allow them to feel more 'Inclined to help' (Magee, 2021). In each image displayed in this design, we can see individuals

suffering, short of breath and struggling to survive. Disturbing images which may distress the audience. The idea that each image showcases an individual and not a group of people is set to allow the audience to empathise with the images, 'where people are more inclined to help when an indivual rather than a group is under threat' (Magee, 2021).

Campaigns such as these were targeted to threaten those who during this time were not obeying the government covid-19 restrictions. 'While the "compliant majority" are observing the rules, this campaign is aimed chiefly at two smaller groups: those who bend the rules and those who ignore the rules because they don't believe the risk of Covid-19 is real or a personal threat to them' (Magee, 2021). Using this approach of visual communication to engage with there target market caused great controversy.

Communicating during a pandemic was said to 'not be easy' (Magee, 2021) and graphic designers had a weight on their shoulders to deliver information in an effective way. Not everyone was convinced that campaigns, such as the one shown in image 3 was the best way to deliver these messages. 'Does an ad that confronts the public with even more fearful images, that encourages people to feel guilty, strike the right tone?' (Magee, 2021). People queried whether the graphic design was too 'hard hitting' (Magee, 2021) during this time and if people needed to be aware of such disturbance. However, using visuals such as these had its negative and positive effects on the community, each graphic design at this time was set to direct a message to the country. The responsibility to help stop the spread of the virus laid heavy on everyone, each person had a part to play in making sure people were aware of the rules, responsibilities and changes going on in the world was at high importance for each graphic designer at this time.

Image 3



UK government: ad has a shift in tone from its previous communication.

(Magee, 2021)

The Covid-19 pandemic underscored the critical role that graphic design plays in shaping public behaviour and health outcomes. Whether through infographics that conveyed complex data in an accessible format, mental health campaigns that provided emotional support, or government messaging that encouraged compliance with public health measures, graphic design served as a tool for saving lives. The ability of graphic design to distil complex messages into clear, trustworthy visuals enabled effective communication during a time of uncertainty for many. As the pandemic highlighted, graphic design is not just about aesthetics; it is a powerful medium that can influence behaviour, support mental well-being, and ultimately save lives.

In a world where information overload and emotional stress is present, graphic design became a vital instrument in guiding the public through one of the most challenging global crises of our time.

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