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Foundation, Element 3: Summative Reflection

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Introduction

The first term assignment required me to develop a pattern for a limited edition Two Tribes can wallpaper and fridge pack which would support the launch of their new venue called Campfire. In this summative reflection, I outline my key considerations for the project and any challenges I experienced during the process. I will reflect on how this experience has helped me develop as a designer and analyse key elements of what I have learned in regards to packaging design and consumers behaviour towards such designs that will guide me on future projects.

1. Project Management

I chose the Berenschot Model as the project management method for this project. I chose this particular method because of the balance between flexibility within the process, which is very much essential for design, and its ability to still retain a clear blue-print of the tasks ahead. This method encapsulates the Deming Cycle (PDSA - Plan, Do, Study, Act), where you can repeat these 4 steps over and over (Edwards, 2021) while also breaking down the project into subprojects and listing the critical tasks for all of them.

As an in-house designer, I had previously worked on a variety of projects, from very short social media graphics to longer ones such as booklets, leaflets and events collateral. However, I had never designed any packaging or handled such a big project for an external client before. This made me feel equally excited and a bit nervous in approaching the task and identifying how to move forward. During our International Business of Design Module, we were presented with a couple of project management methods and that's how I discovered The Berenschot Model. While implementing this method, I have noticed that in dividing my work into smaller projects, I was in fact identifying themes and creating frames, so following the core of the design thinking process according to Dorst (2011) and I was also already creating the basis for my timeline to show to the client (Butler Branding Agency, 2016). I had never considered that my project management methodology would be able to help me not only on the design aspect of my work, but later on in the pitching itself and into making sure that the client respects the project timeline too (Encina, 2019).

The standard daily rate for a Junior Graphic designer in the UK ranges between £150 - £200 (Shillington, 2021) and after diving my project into sub-tasks, I was able to estimate that it would take me roughly 14 days to complete the project, so I decided to charge the client £2100.

2. Packaging, Colour Theory and Customer Behaviour

Food packaging design is something that I have been looking forward to exploring for some time. I was therefore very excited when we were given this brief. When looking at in-person shopping experiences, packaging has a pivotal role not only in aiding the final sale of the product, but also in establishing brand loyalty within the consumer (Neumeier, 2006). I have certainly observed this behaviour in myself, especially in regards to craft beers, when my decision making has been heavily affected by the design of the can more so than the flavour notes description. Guided by this reflection, I set to create something that was as eye-catching as possible, while still retaining the brand's essence.

My first step was to create a colour palette. Unsurprisingly, colour is the single most important sensory feature when it comes to packaging. Consumers are guided by colours, usually associating heavily saturated and vibrant colour with a richer and more intense experience (Mohan, 2013). Instinctively, I knew I wanted to use bold and warm tones as a connection to the fire theme and that I wanted to keep them vibrant as to fit in with the brewery's exciting selection.

After choosing my main colours, I started looking at the use of runic symbols to create the pattern that would wrap around the can. This whole process led me to some interesting reflections and discoveries, which I will expand on later on in this paper. It also made me realise, when taking in consideration the front label of the can, the flavour notes on the back label and the bar code, that I didn't have as much "real-estate" as I originally thought was available for my wallpaper. Given the competitiveness of the craft beer market and the fact that a lot of this competition is driven by intriguing can designs, I wondered why Two Tribes would set such a limitation upon themselves. After delving deeper in my brand analysis I realised that Two Tribe's unique design, a white can with a black lid and front label that consistently has the two black and white stripes showcasing the brewery's logo and the beer name, sets them instantly apart from the visual cacophony of any retailer's shelf. Spence states in her paper that customers tend to identify a brand's product by the colour of their packaging (Spence, 2016). This made me question whether the other breweries weren't missing a very simple trick in making themselves easily identifiable for their market. It also made me curious about applying the same aspect of 'framing' the creative and more playful part of packaging design by using a very simple mono or bi-colour scheme in future projects.

A further interesting point in regards to packaging was raised during the meeting with the clients. While they liked my design and the overall direction I had chosen, they pointed out that the symbols forming my pattern needed to be much larger in order to work as a thumbnail design - be this on form of their website or simply as an Instagram post that would promote the beer.

From this discussion I learnt that I had addressed this brief focusing directly on the physical aspect of the product and not considering the different ways in which the product is exposed, and ultimately sold, to the consumer. The growth of e-commerce had already sparked some questions regarding customers' response in relation to product packaging in an online setting, leading some companies to consider modifying and, in some instances, completely altering the design (Moore, 2011). Nonetheless, this feedback has made me consider how deeply lockdown has changed people's behaviour in regards to any form of product consumption. From this experience, I have learnt to look at physical products in a digital fashion and to investigate every possible avenue of consumption for anything that I will design in the future. More importantly, I learnt that as a designer it is fundamental to retain a certain flexibility in the creative process. So, despite feeling caught off-guard in the meeting with the client, I now believe that this exercise has made me a more well-rounded designer.

3. Cultural Appropriation and Misinterpretation

Upon receiving the brief I was inspired to explore the campfire theme as a ritual. Examples of such rituals include Viking fire ceremonies such Mid-Summer and Yule celebrations. For this reason, I focused a lot of my initial research looking into runic symbols as well as the patterns they used for the battle shields. I then decided to use the runes that symbolise harvest, chalice, fire, man and joy to create my can wallpaper.

I initially created three different concepts for this particular theme. Despite really liking the idea of drawing back to such ancient rituals, I considered whether I was in fact appropriating and trivialising a culture that didn't belong to me nor the client. My research into this led me to an article from Design Week looking at different examples of cultural appropriation. One in particular cited a British brewery for not only using the "Veda" name (Vedas are Hindu's sacred scriptures) but also using their iconography on the label itself (Long, 2020). At this point, I asked myself whether I was not only possibly offending another culture, but also potentially putting my client in a precarious position.

As I delved deeper into this ethical problem it became clear that cultural appropriation by the design community throughout the years has led to the complete change of meaning of some symbols and objects. Yagiz states that when removing material elements such as symbols, goods, sacred and traditional objects from their original culture, their meaning is automatically altered (2010). I have asked myself whether that meant that designers can only be inspired by their country of origin. I consider the answer to that to be no. However, there are some important considerations to keep in mind. Firstly, Pater explains how cultural appropriation is a commonly covered subject in social and cultural studies, but it is rarely taught in design schools, thus revealing a gap where we could all do some further research. Secondly, Long concludes her article with a quote from Red Wing that stuck with me:

"My advice on taking consideration of traditional cultures in design practices is having the designer defend their design choices without the simple answer: 'because it looks cool'." (Long, 2020)

As I was letting this research sink in, I remembered Petrula Vontrikis stressing the fact that designers need to be *"empaths"* as they are essentially conveying messages with their works (2019). This whole process brought me back to my drawing board, staring at my brand analysis. I had to ask myself not only what was the message for this project, but the brand's messages. That's where the missing link that would bring it all back together became obvious.

I was designing for a brewery called "Two Tribes" and, more specifically, I was designing the wallpaper for an *American Pale Ale*. At this moment, I realised that I was not only appropriating northern european's symbols, but I was also misinterpreting the culture behind the product.

Since swapping Viking's runes for Native American's pictograms would still bring me back to square one, I decided that it was time to broaden my research and look into Native American's culture, of course, but also into all the other types of esoteric languages, symbols and sigils. I considered what all of these very different and geographically distanced ways of communications had in common and what makes them different from each other. After creating a rather extensive moodboard, I decided to design a bespoke set of icons for the brewery, thus drawing inspiration from a collection of symbols, but not marginalising any particular culture. The stunning motifs of Native American's textiles served as the last piece of the puzzle as they inspired me to weave in and connect the bespoke symbols I had created as if they were cloth patterns.

I found it fascinating and really enjoyed this part of the process. I repurposed an original idea to create something better and unique. It taught me that going back to the drawing board and starting the research process again is just part of the

creative process and that just because one idea doesn't work as I originally thought it would, that doesn't mean that it should be entirely discarded. More importantly, however, it taught me to pay more attention to the elements that I am borrowing from different cultures as my inspiration.

Conclusion

After reflecting on all the different aspects and issues that I have encountered while working on this project, I can confidently say that I am ending my first term of this postgraduate course feeling like a more well-rounded designer and I am excited to see how the things that I have learnt during this project will form the building blocks for my next development stage.

In particular, I now have a much wider knowledge of different project management methods and I can also identify which one will help me in all of the different project related tasks, like pitching or building a case study later on. I have taken on board that part of my role as a designer is to be empathetic and mindful as to where I draw my inspiration from. If researched and referenced correctly, design can be used to empower marginalised communities and to create a much bigger and more inclusive conversation, where all parties can benefit from. Lastly, I was able to see the 'diamond shape methodology' in use first-hand and learn that ideas can always be repurposed and generate new inspiration; there isn't such a "failed ideas" in design, it is more the case of an under-researched or badly positioned ideas.

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