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Programme of Study: Graphic and Digital Arts

Module: ADAD5003

Research in Context Lecturer's Name: Donna Williams

Word Count : 2567 words

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

When Graphic Design is brought up in conversations, it may not be considered how much influence this profession has on saving lives, this essay will explore examples and question the validity of is this true and how important it may be to saving a life. From cigarette packaging moving from colourful and creative to bold and scary packaging in just a few years or educational posters which can teach somebody how to stay safe during a global pandemic, graphic design can really save lives and create information consumers could find lifesaving. (Bayley, 2017a) Graphic design is everywhere and most don't realize how graphic design is influential and how many lives it does save. Visual communication from a designer to the consumer of information is a very important part of design because they can massively affect the influence of public health by just one solid message. From a poster to a medical packaging filled with lifesaving medicine, if the information needed isn't clear then the person could put a vulnerable person at risk. (Martin, 2017) What it really comes to is when a consumer of information looks towards something that is being visually communicated to them, graphic design itself may not save a life, but it can make you think. (Bayley, 2017b)

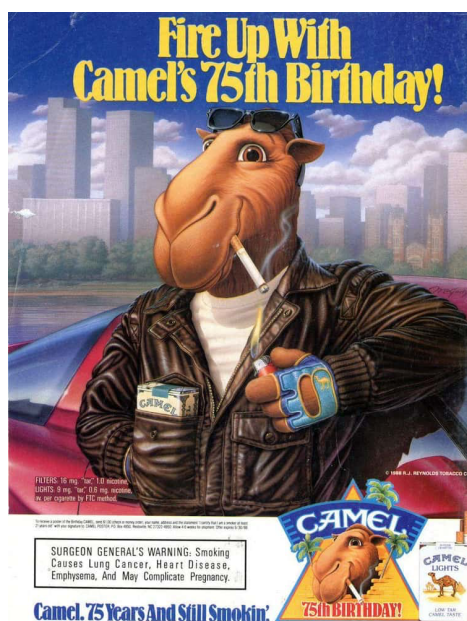


Fig 1. Joe Camel, 1988 campagin – ranker.com

Cigarette packaging is something which has evolved over time in a completely different direction than one would think, it has gone from colourful and creative packaging to bland and scary packaging and that is evidence in the changing times of design. A simple change to move from the appealing packaging to bland packaging with “Smoking Kills” all over the packaging could save somebodies life. Cigarette packaging went from being a ‘harmless’ and in some regards ‘healthy’ pass-time to make people want to buy it. Cigarette packaging in the early 20th century made you feel as if you needed to smoke to become a part of the “in-group” and something you needed to be a part of. (Goett, 2016) As time went on however, this took a huge turn. In the late 80s packaging started to become problematic, ‘Camel Cigarettes’ created Joe Camel, a cartoon mascot for the company. The problem with this came from how the cartoon mascot ended up looking like it was being targeted towards younger audiences. Jodie Bernstein in 1991, former director of the FTC’s consumer trade protection, said “Joe Camel has become as recognizable to kids as Mickey Mouse” which is not the right image to capture when a company is trying to market towards adults, and the audience they capture are kids. (Fulwood, 1997) This was the final straw for many people, which promoted a big change in cigarette packaging. Australia was the first country to start this and legally put into place that you needed to have all cigarettes be sold in plain packaging. Although the packaging hasn’t exactly helped bring the number of people smoking down, a whole generation of children has grown up with the packaging of cigarettes be ugly and plain, the complete opposite to 20 years before which had a cartoon mascot plastered on them appealing to the younger audiences, unintentionally or not. There may be a new battle on the hands of young consumers

though when it comes to a rise in E-Cigs and vaping numbers rising with school children, and now it seems that E-Cigs and vaping has now began to adopt the old packaging styles of cigarette packaging with its bright colours and fun designs. (Clun, 2021) This is something graphic design that has helped shape a generation of information consumers into knowing the risks of cigarettes, you may not think it saves your life but it definingly makes you think about what you're doing and what you're about to consume.



Fig 2. Plain cigarette packaging, 2017 – wemadethis.co.uk

Medical products are a big part of graphic design saving a life. The health usage of graphic design is everywhere from packaging to lifesaving posters, effective communication is very important to relay information back to the person viewing it. The curators of the 'Can graphic design save your life' exhibition, Lucienne Roberts and Rebecca Wright used their exhibition to highlight the six main themes of graphic design becoming an integral role in health from persuasion, education, hospitalisation, medication, contagion and provocation. (Pinion, 2017) When looking towards how graphic design can save your life, it's important to recognize the impact something as unnoticeable as a package could be for medication. For many people,

the packaging of medicine is standard, something that has always been there; but the importance of this is usually forgotten. Medical packaging has been around for a very long time, from 'preserving freshness, preventing contamination and protecting from damage' and overtime it's a piece of design that has constantly evolved. (Orton, 2005) Medical packaging has evolved overtime to become clear ways to push information forward to consumers to know exactly what they are using. From dosage to medical advice the packaging of medicine is a huge part of relaying the most important information in an effective and universal way. Although there are issues that come from packaging design for medical usages which may carry the opposite effect of 'Graphic Design Saving Your Life' as highlighted in Pilchik's 'Validating Medical Packaging', these packages would need to be identifiable so a consumer doesn't accidentally pick up the wrong medicine which would be a flaw and possibly lethal, so it is always important that it becomes identifiable to everyone. (Pilchik, 2002, p10)



Fig 3. Disposable face mask packaging, 2021 – fwcadvertising.com

When saving lives with graphic design, way finders are a huge piece of information that needs to be relayed to a person, it is a lifesaving piece of information in many

regards which can help direct somebody to the area they need to go. There is a level of 'knowing' that needs to be translated through the design of wayfinding, a designer cannot expect every single visitor who walks through a hospital to know exactly where to go; there needs to be varying levels of aid to help a visitor who may need it. Like many things, if a visitor lacks experience in a situation like this it can lead to much confusion and hospitals can already be a stressful environment to be in. (Huelat, 2007a) Way finders are just that important when it comes to saving a life because without them. Much like packaging designs, way finders need to be clear, easy to read and identifiable to help a verity of visitors. Huelat's findings go on to mention how good wayfinding can go on to create the 'reduction of stress and frustration for the visitor', 'safety' and 'Visitor accessibility' all key parts of creating a lifesaving design. And the way finder, as also documented by Huelat in 'Wayfinding: Design for Understanding', Way finding is reliant on five main factors; knowing where the visitor is currently, knowing where visitor's destination is, knowing which route will get the visitor to their destination, the visitors ability to follow the route set out with the way finder and most importantly letting the visitor know they have reached their destination. (Huelat, 2007b) Visible, bold and clear way finders are the key to helping visitors throughout hospitals and potentially being able to save a life. Graphic Design doesn't just save lives, it can also 'improve patient wellbeing' by an ease of accessibility and easy to look at designed assets such as way finders and posters. (Brewer, 2017)



Fig 4. Providence Hospital way-finder solution – avalisway.com

Much like way finders and medical packaging, there is another thing graphic design also plays a huge part in when it comes to saving lives, and that is persuasion.

Medical persuasion plays a major part in being able to keep people safe as it's a designer's duty to relay key information to the person who would be consuming the information being put before them. Graphic Design has been used as a 'vital communication tool' for a very long time when it came to communicating key information such as how to safe from something like COVID-19. In 2020, a campaign called 'Catch it, Bin it, kill it' was launched in an attempt to counter the surge in COVID cases. This effectively worked due to its harsh design. The governments design for this campaign didn't sugar coat the seriousness of the message. (Hydra Creative, 2020) This is very important because if a designer gave a message which could be lifesaving, in very bright and flashy fun colours the person consuming the information may not take it as serious than if someone saw a very bold and plain poster, which would be more likely to make you follow that advice. The graphical communication between the information being relayed and the consumer of that information is increasingly important. This is further touched upon with New

Zealand's approach to their COVID-19 campaign. They decided to go with a typeface and colour palette which didn't seem threatening, implying a forceful approach which could have sparked a rebellion of consumers not wanting to follow the rules. New Zealand went with an informative and non-threatening approach. This was achieved by using yellow and white stripes to give off an authoritative yet intriguing design to draw people in. (Khandwala, 2021) This works very well in saving lives through graphic communication because instead of making people worried with red markings which would spark some tense response, the designers attacked the matter in a much more approachable manner which would grab more people's attention in a more natural way. Designers were left to spread the message of how dangerous something like COVID-19 could be, most were left promoting staying at home and washing hands. As a collective, many artists thought they could 'help by creating something useful that can make a difference' and many artists took it upon themselves to create posters and infographics with key information about how to help and how to stay safe. (Hitti, 2020). Because of graphic design, key information about the latest big pandemic was passed around from person to person, sometimes even going viral which created a lot of buzz. Graphic Designers were extremely influential with images or information graphics which educated people and saved many lives from COVID-19. Using one simple message; stay at home.



Fig 5. New Zealand 'stay at home' COVID-19 response poster, 2020 – comtrust.org.nz

Along with this, signage is a huge part of being able to keep people safe with graphic design. Way finders are important with directions and keeping people calm, collected and making visitors time at a new location be as stress free as possible and saving valuable time which could save a life. Some signs which could really save a life are some signs that some information consumers may not even notice are there because they are familiar with seeing them all the time and that would be road signs. From one-way signs to speed limit signs, these are all assets to public health and safety which often go overlooked. Without road signs serious accidents could easily happen, if a driver went down a road at a high speed, no idea what the limit is they could end up causing some serious damage or worse; cause lethal harm to themselves and/or another person. What road signs create a sense of authority and lawful implications which educate people and inform a driver how fast they should be going at one time. One simple selection of signage can save many lives and it is something often overlooked because of how standard road signs are. (Bayley, 2017c) With this, having a standard warning style all around the world can considerably help too. If a driver is in a different country and may not speak and/or

read fluent in that language, they can easily identify what each sign can be. This can be done in many ways, something which doesn't really change around the world is colours and shapes of signs. For example, red will always mean stop and danger, and diamond signs universally mean warning. It is something that doesn't change to help people of various levels of understanding. The stop sign is something that is now always red, it shows drivers from any background and location that red means stop and that is a universal rule understood by many drivers. (Travis, 2018) Signs are important not only for their shape, colour and recognizability, but their readability too. When designers are commissioned/hired to design signs such as way finders and road signs credited graphic design as a 'service'. That design wasn't just design at that point; these were people designing to save lives. It's important to recognize how much goes into creating a sign, 'service' design can be a life-or-death situation so has to go through so many tests that a normal design would go through. These designers are not selling a consumer an item, they are trying to warn them of what is coming, which could save a life. (Khaleeli, 2015)



Australia



Laos



Qatar

Fig 6. Different types of cross walk signs around the world, 2018 – frontsigns.com

Graphic design saves lives in many ways, as covered by the book and exhibition 'Can Graphic Design Save Your Life?', it could be a design that is obviously there to catch your attention like a COVID-19 advice poster which is used to educate and persuade a consumer into making a consumer think and how this can be reflected in something you see every day such as road signs and way finders or cigarette packaging. It's important to recognize that graphic design and visual communication is everywhere no matter where somebody may look design could save a life. A bigger question which could be raised from this isn't just 'Could graphic design save your life?', it could be 'Could graphic design save the world?'. Maybe not on its own, but visual communication within design could impact the world. Every designer is different, every designer carries their own strengths and weaknesses, and every designer focuses on a different perspective of design, so a packaging designer could save the world; 'It is how they address the problems in their area' which is the important part. (Montgomery, 2014)

I personally think, in conclusion to this essay asking the question "Can graphic design save your life?", graphic design could really save a life. From cigarette packaging where we have seen it go from cartoon characters and trying to get people to consume them to now where it is covered in bad pictures turning people away, it all plays a bigger role in saving lives. However, with the rise of younger people smoking the alternatives, it seems as if they have begun to pick up on the earlier trends of cigarettes. The kind of trends which got outlawed have now began to reappear in packaging which speaks to a younger audience and could be time for a brand-new attempt to counter this curve in the market too. Angus Montgomery, 2014, brought to life the question "Can design save the world" and I think that maybe

not design itself could save the world, but it can make you think. The COVID stay at home measures are a great way to show the power of graphic designers on a wider scale, how one design could hold so much power in saving many people.



Fig 7. Vape/E-Cig's packaging getting more fun and creative, 2021 – yourboxsolution.com

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