

Research in practice

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Words: 2,725

Keywords:

- 1) Inspire
- 2) Help
- 3) Innovate

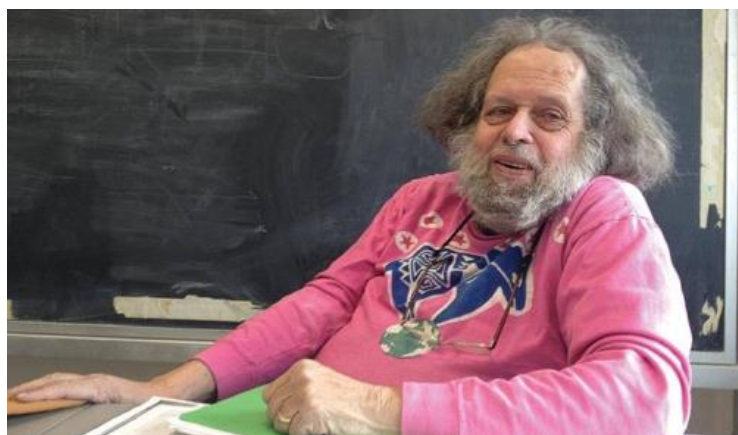
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Introduction:

This piece of writing revolves around three keywords, a minimum of three key images and three Practitioners/Theorists in hopes of producing a final question for my year 3 dissertation. As I began to think about what three words interest me most, I believe choosing words that are emotionally attached to me is the direction I would like to take. This is because I enjoy uncovering more about myself, strengthening my well-being, and reminding myself why I'm doing what I love; Graphic design. Therefore, my three words are **Inspire, help, and innovate** and my three practitioners/theorists are Tony Fadell, Marshall Berman, and Kuo-Lun Hsiao.



(Fig 1. Fadell, 2018)



(Fig 2. Berman, 2022)



(Fig 3. Hsiao, 2022)

Inspire:

“[To] fill (someone) with the urge or ability to do or feel something, especially to do something creative.” (Oxford Languages and Google - English | Oxford Languages, 2022).

This word also is a feeling which extends beyond that definition and into the realm of human experiences, there will always be aspects which cannot be explained by words alone. I believe being inspired is one of the most powerful feelings for a human, especially those in creative industries. Without this, it would be impossible to come up with solutions to inform or captivate people, which are in my belief within our role as designers.

Inspiration is the spark, the initial ideas that evoke passion and become more considered, higher quality output, but how do designers get inspired in the first place? Proto.io, a mobile app prototyping platform, asked designers across the world what inspires designers and how they stay in that mind-frame. One of the most frequent answers were - listening to music. This statement corroborates other evidence from various researchers, such as Chi-Meng Liao's 'Effects of listening to related music on idea generation in design project' (Liao, 2016). Within Liao's research, a task was set for designers to design a Japanese lamp. The

experiment was constructed to see how listening to related (Japanese music) and non-related music affects the designs. A discovery was made; as the related Japanese style music, provided “... an auditory clue” when the subjects proceeded to design the lamps, therefore, “... listening to music that is related to the design theme, as compared to non-related music, most of the subjects produced more design concepts that are related to the design theme.”(Liao, 2016). I would agree that music and other forms of creative work have inspired me continuously in life, hugely impacted my approach to design and helped to maintain an inspired mindscape.



(Fig 4. Jacob, 2019)

Collaboration with other professionals can also be a major factor in inspiring others and in becoming inspired as it opens the horizons to creatives outside of the graphic design sector. Another interesting response was to investigate other forms of design. “Just because a designer works outside of your industry, it doesn’t mean that you can’t find fresh, new ideas based on their creations.” (Valentine, 2022) Collaboration with peers and research into your field can also inspire us but adhering to your preferred medium and style can begin to

confine your ideas. Considering the designs of those in other fields of work can bring fresh inspiration, coming up with new ideas subsequently pushes the boundaries of your work and becomes a chain reaction for further inspiration itself.

As a person who regularly seeks inspiration, I recently came across a TED talk that really sparked my motivation and inspired me as a designer. Tony Fadell, the originator of the iPod, said that “As human beings, we get used to everyday things really fast. As a product designer, it's my job to see those everyday things, to feel them, and try to improve upon them.” (Fedell,2015) Continuous improvement and movement of ideas are key to successful graphic design, keeping up with fast-paced innovation is what design is all about, and newness is important to inspire. I hope to remain inspired, but also to be inspiring through my work and I aim to use this to improve on the ever-changing socio-political climate around me as well as influence cultural and behavioural aspects of society.



(Fig 5. Hartman 2015)

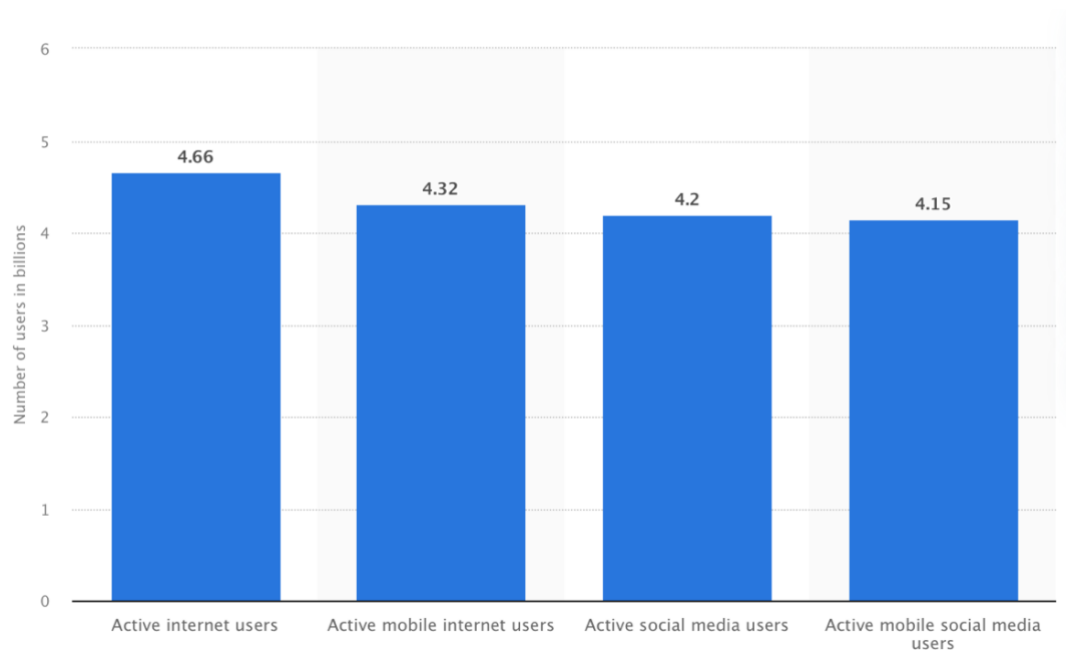
Help

One of graphic designs' many functions is to abate figures and statistics to help comprehend complex information. It also possesses the ability to improve personal growth and well-being, by compelling us to consider change and reflect on characteristic flaws. Mental health service, Xyla Digital Therapies, states that "...imagining either negative or positive images can have a substantial impact on our emotions, despite not necessarily being real." (Gage, 2022)

In my experience of working with and listening to other designers, they often want to use their skills with others' interests at heart, therefore, many wish to utilize our carefully crafted imagery to guide, inspire and captivate people creating a better quality of life. This statement is supported by one of our studied modules: Unit 1, Section 1- 'How Innovation Shapes the World' as it states, "in our everyday life, we are almost constantly interacting with innovations of some kind that have been designed to enhance our lives" (How Innovation Shapes The World, 2022) which also applies to graphic design. As society continuously changes, graphic design also adapts and guides people to meet the needs of the world.

Graphic design has undoubtedly made an impact on the quality of everyday life but, on the other hand, some people may argue that this is a misconception. Some may think that graphic design has impacted our lives negatively as it's played a role in the mobile consumption issue.

“In 2021, users in the United Kingdom spent an average of four hours per day using their mobile devices. This represents an increase from the 3.7 hours that users in the country spent on their smartphones during the previous years.” (Johnson, 2022)



(Fig 6. Johnson, 2022)

Clearly, these statistics about digital consumption are concerning regarding the uncertainty of how this affects our mental health and wellbeing. Izzal Asnira Zolkepli stated in her journal ‘Mobile consumer behaviour on apps usage’ that “...little is known on the role they [mobile apps] play in shaping the behaviour of the mobile consumer” and that the effects are “unsubstantiated”. (Zolkepli, Mukhiar and Tan, 2020) Kuo-Lun Hsiao’s research into ‘Exploring the effect of compulsive social app usage on technostress and academic performance’, also mentions, “Although social apps provide people with additional convenience, overuse of such applications may have negative life effects”. (Hsiao, 2022)

In response to the research gathered by Hsiao (2022), we as designers could consider that without the strong, slick, and striking designs that enhance the user experience, perhaps the number of overall users would be lower, but as stated by several experts, the mobile consumption matter is new and is an issue that we have never dealt with before. As designers, as well as the encouragement of usage due to effective design, we also have the power to use those skills to advise on limiting social media usage and 'screen time'. We could do this by creating designs which have just as compelling an effect, but to educate the public on how excessive screen use can be harmful to overall health. It is also important to consider that although an enhancement of experience on digital devices is created by quality graphic design, the social and communication aspect, as well as marketing algorithms, are a huge contributor to that dopamine boost which makes mobile consumption addictive. Designers also have the power to reverse those behavioural patterns.

Design has not only been proven to help others but also the designers as well in the process. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people were facing a wide range of mental health disorders. Examples include anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder. Min Tang, a professor in International Management at the University of Applied Management in Germany, conducted research into the effectiveness of creativity in coping with crisis during the pandemic and achieving both flourishing and social well-being.



(Fig 7. Slocum, 2021)

With 1,420 participants from China, Germany, and the United States, Tang discovered that “...no matter whether they are from more individualistic or collectivistic cultures, people benefit from the engagement in creativity in helping them achieve positive, flourishing experiences.” (Tang et al., 2021) Aside from their flourishing experiences, people from collectivist countries also feel more connected to their social groups because of creative engagement and creative growth.

Since I began my journey as a graphic designer, using my creative values, especially during times of crisis, has helped reduce anxiety and despondency and increased my sense of accomplishment, resilience, and comprehension, therefore, I can say that I wholeheartedly relate with Tang’s findings.

Innovate

Being innovative is to apply a modern perception and “To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world—and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are.” (Calabrese and Berman, 1984) The quest for newness and ideas requires forward-thinking and creative future thinking, this is very important within design. Calabrese and Berman suggest that to innovate we must discard current or past thinking and what we have learnt within society, therefore I think that innovation is key to graphic design as it pushes boundaries and keeps the development of concepts continuously flowing.

As a designer, seeking to be innovative with our concepts is what drives many of us. Continuously using the same methods of communication through imagery will eventually become ineffective, therefore, being innovative is crucial as it can cultivate new solutions, improve performance, and facilitate growth. Learning thinking techniques to enable innovative thinking is very useful to a designer, but the natural thinking methods of a designer also are beneficial to those wanting to innovate. “DT [design thinking] has been argued as a successful method for generating new ideas” (Chasanidou, Gasparini, Lee, 2015) and “a large number of design methods and tools facilitate the DT process and support fostering innovations” therefore innovation is not only key to graphic design but interlinked. It is also important to recognise the multidisciplinary and team focussed approaches to innovative thinking, as to myself, and many graphic designers, collaboration is one of our most important tools, especially when communicating with those of different professional

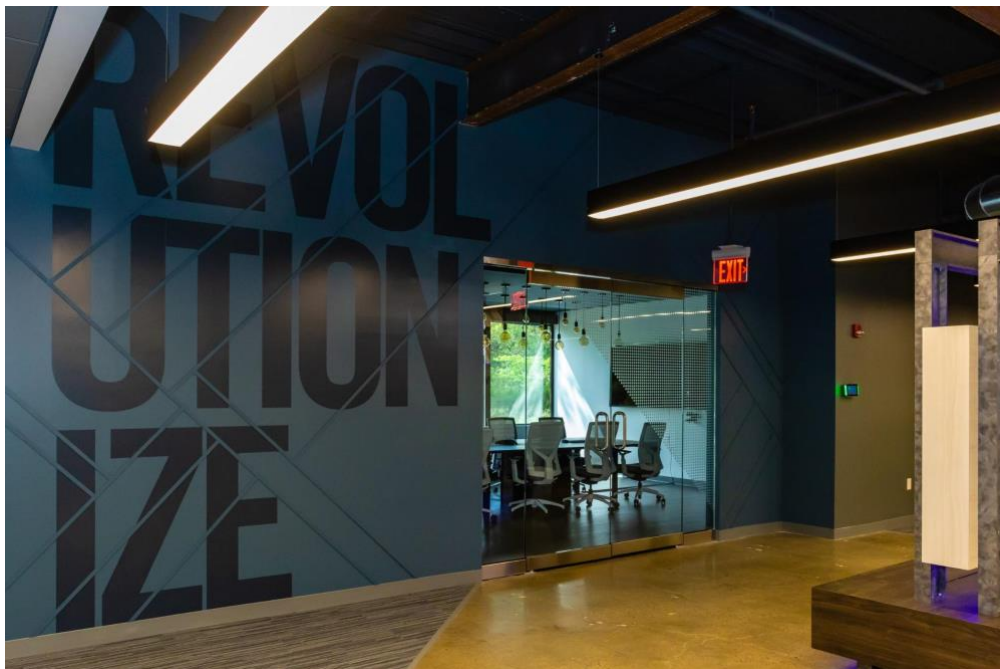
backgrounds as again it allows for further expansion of creativity and thus, in turn, innovative ideas and more successful output.

Fedell says in his TED talk; “I try to learn from people like Mary [Anderson] to try to see the world the way it really is, not the way we think it is. Why? Because it's easy to solve a problem that almost everyone sees. But it's hard to solve a problem that almost no one sees.”(Fadell,2015) This is an intriguing concept as it further develops the idea of Calbrese and Berman aforementioned. In response to this quote, I have researched some innovative graphics that are benefiting not only us but our planet.



(Fig 8. Kondratowicz, 2008)

The concept presented in the image above is one of the new perspectives and discards an approach that is so embedded in society. It's interesting to see how something that does not seem like a problem (the colour of bin bags) could have a bigger impact than the general perception. Bin bags being plain black allows them to fade into the sin of the city, having a more eye-catching design can draw attention to the environmental issue of general waste and makes the quantity more obvious, stressing the scale of the problem. Awareness is key to change and the idea of this almost garish look to these bin bags undoubtedly creates that. This is a perfect example of the small but mighty out of the box thinking that the concept of innovation inspires. Graphic design is so important to the modern world that we should always consider innovation when creating a piece that will have a social, environmental, economic, or political implication. Often many of these areas are addressed at one time.



(Fig 9. Terceira, 2020)

Another innovative idea is the use of Environmental Graphics. This has been a growing concept over the last couple of years which uses graphic design and visuals within a workspace to decorate, the use of this has increased as several companies have noticed that productivity levels have increased when being attentive to the visual appearance of the workplace. Rae Lam, an editor for the 'Worktech Achadamy' mentions, "Learning from such experiments, graphic design can be leveraged to provide appropriate levels of mental stimulation – allowing creativity to flourish while maintaining focus." (Dzebic, Maynard, Smit and Myerson, 2022) proving that paying attention to the visual appearance of workspaces, companies help their employees and themselves excel purely through the power of graphic design. This example effectively illustrates the strong connection between design and innovation, especially within the graphic field as they exist co-dependently, relying on one another to push a new generation of ideas.

Innovation requires creativity as it is essentially 'thinking outside of the box' but with the inclusion of professional and useful ideas, rather than just something different. To truly 'think outside of the box' requires an imaginative view of the future and problem-solving ability that seeks the challenge of creation to make life easier or to solve a problem.

Graphics is not always the solution but can often provide one in many issue areas. It can be seen to tackle all areas of modern difficulties; environmental, political, social among many others have seen innovative graphics that have helped to gain attention to issues as well as aid in solving many of the problems we face. Again, to draw attention to Fadell and his attention to 'problem[s] that almost no one sees,' shows where graphic design has the most important role, even the smallest concepts can have the biggest impact.

To conclude my findings:

Graphics seem to find a place within many concepts that I hold importance personally, there is a role for them in all aspects of life and it is a powerful tool that will be used to propel ideas far into the future. It is a source of inspiration, and undoubtedly inspires others. It harnesses creativity to make helpful tools and spreads information, as well as gives creative tools to people which improves mental health. It also inspires further innovation and requires innovative thinking itself.

It is also interesting to see how each of these interlink; one of the questions that emerged from this research that I may be able to consider for my dissertation was 'how can graphic design help to inspire innovative thinking?' There is some research that explores how design-thinking can aid the progression of innovation, however, there was less in terms of graphic design itself. It could be interesting to find out in more detail specifically what within graphics inspires us to innovate. I could create a piece and a graphic design-based presentation to measure the engagement of the audience and their idea generation following this to see if graphics do in turn have the effect of inspiring innovation. However, the lack of research within this field makes it a difficult concept to measure.

The increasing use of digital devices is also a concern when considering the future and harnessing innovative skills it could be useful to further research 'how could graphic design reverse the behavioural patterns of excessive time spent on digital devices?' Based on my findings regarding the increasing and damaging effects of digital consumption as well as the Environmental Graphics example it would be interesting to further research graphic design

techniques which have an impact on behaviour and use it positively to help reduce screen time and measure its effectiveness. After finding out graphic techniques which can impact behavioural changes, I could work to create some of my own designs using this and do some follow up qualitative research in order to gauge the response to this.

The keywords chosen undoubtedly are concepts which affect each other, I think it would be interesting to further explore those concepts in relation to one another. Helpful graphic design is what's most important and inspiring to me as a designer and I wish to have innovative ideas which can help to change the future. Researching these words has unquestionably allowed more scope for generating ideas for further research within the field of graphic design.

QUESTIONS

How could graphic design reverse the behavioural patterns of time spent on digital devices?

How can graphic design help inspire innovative thinking?

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