

Independent Project Proposal

Student name: Nicole Jeremiah

Student number: 2000849

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Tutor name: Julia Lockheart

Three keywords: Time, Value and Communication

Throughout this research dissertation, I will explore my three keywords: time, value and influence within the context of product design. I have chosen to explore the meaning and importance of time because it is something we all have, that can be used, taken and gained. The following keywords, value and influence, have been selected so I can investigate certain aspects of design that may be used by a product designer. By exploring these keywords, I hope to gain useful knowledge to form a question for my independent project.

Time

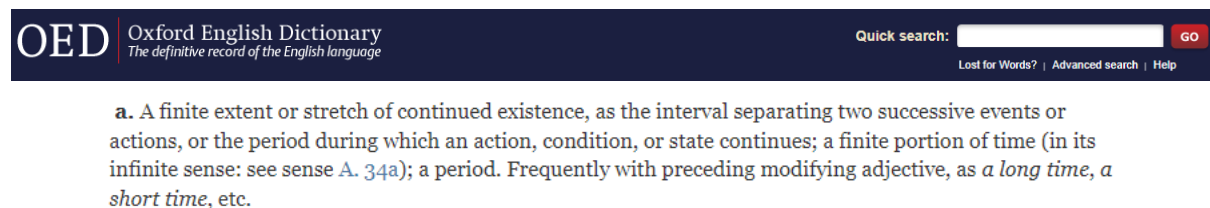


Fig 1. Definition of time (Oxford English Diction, 2022)

The first keyword I have chosen is time. As shown in figure 1, the Oxford English Dictionary has defined the word time. It describes time as a continuous period and the in-between of different moments. A more in-depth definition may break time down into 3 sections, the past, present and future. Time has been split into these sections so we can understand and communicate when certain moments have happened, are happening and when they will happen. We will always be living in the present tense because we are a series of moments that will always happen in the present tense. Once a moment has happened, it is in the past.

The idiom 'tomorrow never comes' is explained by the online free dictionary "that it will never be tomorrow because when tomorrow arrives it becomes today". Furthermore, it states the underlying meaning of this idiom is to do things today and not put them off until tomorrow because you may never get around to doing them. This leads to my next point that a good design should be efficient. If a good design is efficient, it should fulfil the task quicker than its predecessor and maintain or increase the standard of work. For example, at the touch of a button, we can communicate with people on the other side of the world. Before the invention of the mobile phone, it could take weeks, even months, to send a written letter across the world. Arguably, a mobile saves us time when sending messages, filling out forms and seeking information. On the other hand, a phone is a huge distraction to most, "stealing our time and attention" (Insight, 2020). A new term, 'alone together', coined by Sheryl Turkle encapsulates the "idea of spending time on devices to the neglect of interaction with those who are physically nearby" (Chatzitheochari & Mullan, 2019). According to the highlight magazine, the average family "manages to enjoy two hours and 23 minutes of each other's company every day" (Vellacott, 2015). Studies have shown both adults and children spend "the same amount of time (around 90 minutes) using mobile devices when together" daily (Chatzitheochari & Mullan, 2019). That roughly equates to two-thirds of the time being spent together is actually 'alone together'.

In a 2016 TED talk, Tristan Harris explained that by redesigning existing technology we could regain control of how to spend our time. Harris claims that this new way of designing could only be done by top designers that change their way of thinking. This new system of thinking wouldn't be "measured in time spent" to rate its success, but rather measure success in the quality time we have gained from the product (Harris, 2016).

Time is individual to us. We all experience a different sequence of moments that makes up our unique timeline. “Time is nothingness”, yet what we do with our time and other people’s time is something (Feras, 2016). Time cannot be seen, heard, smelt, tasted or even felt. All we can see is the effect that time has, through the changing of moments, whether this is showing signs of age, or a shadow moving throughout the day. We all have different amounts of time yet how can this be without us being able to sense it? Only through knowledge, we can try to understand what time is and how it works so we can use it wisely. As humans, we are obsessed with keeping time on a linear scale. We do not know who created the first-time keeping device, but research has shown that “the first sundials were used as early as 5000 BC by Babylonians and Egyptians to measure daytime hours” as displayed in figure 2 (Sanchez, 2022). Why should we be aware of the time? If we want to do something, why not do it in the moment?



Fig 2. Sundial (History of watch, 2022)

Lastly, a product should stand the test of time. In today’s ‘throwaway society’ designers should consider the lasting effects of their products. If a product lasts a long time, it can be reused by many generations. Good design means that products are “designed well enough that they last a considerable amount of time” and shouldn’t need continuous redesigning to be used in the future. (Davidson, 2018). When choosing materials, a fine balance is needed to find the right qualities of a material that can stand the test of time and can still be reused in other products to prolong its time in circulation.

Value

The Labour theory of value by Karl Marx states that there are two types of value: use value and exchange value. Use value refers to how much a product fulfils human needs and desires. Exchange value looks at products in comparison to one another, and how one item can be traded for another. There must be a similarity with every product for them to be compared to each other. Marx believed that if “we disregard the use-value of commodities, only one property remains, that of being products of labour” (Marx, 1867). To clarify, this means that a product could be exchanged for another based only on the work that went into making it. For example, if it takes 30 minutes to hunt a deer and an hour to hunt a badger, two deer can be traded for one badger. This theory had one issue if it takes one person an hour to make a product and another person two hours to make the same product, how are two identical products valued the same with different labour times? This led to the term concrete labour, the work an individual performs to get to the end result, and the term abstract labour, which considers historical and social factors on how much labour is needed for a specific commodity. Thereby, one worker who takes an hour and another that takes two hours to make the same product would produce the same value for a product. The workers would be valued differently instead of their product. The first worker would have the same concrete labour to abstract labour ratio, one hour of labour is equal to the average hour of labour. The second worker would have a 2:1 ratio, their two hours of labour are only worth one hour. If this theory was implemented, customers would get value for money because they would only pay for the abstract labour of the product. This would not work in an ideal world as this theory does not consider the risk factor of employers, the cost of machinery, marketing and designing. This is understandable as it was written in the days of the industrial

revolution when the value was produced by factories whereas it can be produced in marketing, designing, branding and developing global commodities.

The subjective theory of value opposes the labour theory of value. The value of an object is determined by “how much people desire or need the object” and not by the labour it requires (Gordon,2022). Consequently, a product is only valuable if people want or need it, this brings us to supply and demand. Ultimately, a designer can charge as much as they want for their product, overheads and labour need to be paid for and people need to be there that want to buy the product.

The Cambridge dictionary gives two definitions of the word value that are of interest. Firstly, “the amount of money that can be received for something” (Cambridge dictionary, 2022). To give value for money to the customer the retail price of a product needs to be lower than the recommended retail price. Designing, testing, manufacturing and marketing cost must be kept to a minimum so profit can still be made. This can be increasingly difficult in a “world of competition, costs and schedules” (Norman, 2013). When focusing on the designing phase of a product, it

can be beneficial for a designer to consider certain impacts their design has. For example, the cutting pattern may be evaluated, and this can impact the design aesthetically and financially. In figure 3 a cutting pattern can be seen for a zero-waste garment. The cutting pattern for this shirt enables material wastage to be reduced. This could be implemented within different manufacturing techniques including laser cutting and CNC machining. The lack of waste material cuts costs. Even though these costs are being cut in the manufacturing phase, it would be because of the designer

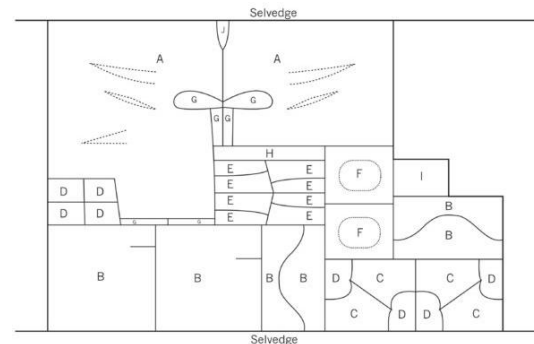


Fig 3. Zero-waste pattern (Timo Rissanen, 1999)

considering this in the design phase. There are many other ways a designer can have an impact on the cost. This includes material choice, reduction of material usage (shown in figure 4) and exclusion of unnecessary features. The value of a product doesn't always relate to the monetary value of a product.



Fig 4. OIKOS yogurt package redesign (Kashty, 2015)

The second definition provided by the Cambridge dictionary says that value can be “the importance or worth of something for someone”. This raises the question of, can a product designer influence the importance of their product? Arguably, a designer can influence the importance of their product. If a product is well designed, manufactured and marketed it can have as much importance as an apple I-phone in the modern world. Many decisions in the design phase controlled by the designer can influence the success of their product. This is only necessary if importance is interpreted as having a significant impact, whether that be socially, culturally or economically. Products can also have sentimental worth to an individual. This means the product promotes “feelings of tenderness, sadness or nostalgia” to an individual (Oxford languages, 2022). This could be purposeful of the designer by using designs of the past to influence their work to unlock memories for individuals. A product could be valuable to an individual because of this, which then leads to them buying the item.

Communication

Communication is a big aspect of product design. As designers, we are constantly trying to communicate our designs and ideas with other designers, engineers, clients and end-users. A designer can communicate through their products, logo, branding, research and media. It is also important for a designer to listen to individuals for feedback to develop their designs further. After all, what is the use of a product that doesn't fulfil the needs of the intended end user?

There are many communication techniques in design, this includes form and figure, colour, composition and typography. It is easy to imagine a writer choosing their words to communicate a message. Similarly, "good designers choose the right visual elements to also communicate a message" (Toda, 2017). Before a designer makes their choices on visuals, they should decide what message they want to send through their product to the users. For this to happen several questions need to be asked, who is the target market, what problems do they face, what problem do I want to solve, how will this benefit the customer and how does it differ from current products?

In figures 5 and 6 two different pairs of shoes can be seen. At a glance, they could be mistaken for the same shoe yet one will cost you £490 and the other will cost you £19.99 to buy. Considering visuals alone, they both look to be of similar quality, size and function, so why are they so different in price? To better our understanding, a brief understanding of semiotics is needed. Semiotics is the study of "signs and symbols and their uses and their interpretation" (Oxford Languages, 2022). Saussure's theory states there are two components to a sign, the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the physical existence of

the sign, either a sound, word or image. The signified is the mental concept, what we think of when we see the sign. For example, the word 'apple' is a signifier and the related thought of being healthy or a computer brand would be the signified. Peirce declared that the signifier could be separated into three different categories: an icon, an index and a symbol. An icon "looks just the way the object that it stands for looks", an index "represents a sign that draws the viewers' attention to a specific function" and a symbol "no connection to the meaning they are transporting" (Brig, 2019). For instance, a picture of a dog would be an icon, a cartoon of a dog would be an index and the word 'dog' would be a symbol. Referring to the two pairs of shoes, one difference is the diamante logo on the outer side of the figure 5 shoe. Through branding and marketing, customers relate this image with Gucci, a well-known, high-end brand. This is also enforced on the back of the shoe with the word 'GUCCI'. Individuals are not just buying a shoe when they purchase these trainers, they are also buying into the brand. Why do people want to do this with such a big cost difference? By buying into the brand, they are creating a statement about themselves, 'I can afford Gucci' and 'I only want the best'. This is done through years of clever marketing and designing. Focusing on the design aspects of the shoe, almost immediately the customer feels that this shoe is high-end, top of the market and only the wealthy can afford it. This was purposely designed by the design to send this message across.



Fig 5. Gucci shoes (Selfridges & Co, 2022)



Fig 6. White trainers (H&M, 2022)

Conclusion

To conclude, my exploration of my three keywords has identified a few sub-questions I believe that need answering within my independent project. These include, what time do people value, how do I want my product to impact a user's time and experience, and how can I communicate my idea to the masses? By investigating the word communication, I have been shown the importance of defining what a product should say and this will be taken forward in my independent project. After researching Marx's labour theory of design, I have concluded that I do not want the time and effort spent in designing and making to show through in my final product. Even though the signs of labour in a piece can be related to beauty, for me "simplicity is the key to excellence" (Rams, 2017). Research of the word time has highlighted the fact that not all products have had the desired effect of the designer. The invention of the mobile phone was initially designed to reduce time spent writing and sending messages, this can have an adverse effect of distracting and wasting time away. This can be seen by new terminology such as FOMO (fear of missing out) and alone together. This has made me realise the importance of considering all consequences of bringing a new product into the world. I have defined a starting point for my project with my working question of 'how can a product encourage better use of time, utilizing sentimental worth to continue a product for generations, whilst staying appropriate for use through applying relevant design communication techniques? Further exploration is needed into design communication techniques, how to make a product sentimental, how we should spend time, the durability of a product, user engagement and adaptation for future generations within my working question for next year.

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