

Student Name: Deimantas Salvys

P Number: 2306866

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Lecturer: Donna Williams

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Can Graphic design save a life?

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The question today we will be talking and exploring about is a famous saying “can graphic design save a life’. In our current generation we see Graphic Design anywhere we go or do in our day-to-day lives, this could include, looking at social media on the phone, walking or driving to the shop, going to a doctor's appointment, or taking your kids to School. Graphic design has been around us for many thousand years ago and we keep discovering older forms of graphic as the years go on such as the Egyptian cave art where they used symbols and images to convey meaning. These symbols and images converted showed us the messages of afterlife, religious beliefs, and the power of the pharaohs, these art pieces were mostly found in tombs, temples, and monuments (Robinson, A. (2001) The story of writing: Alphabets, hieroglyphs & pictograms.). And over the years we have seen a mass improvement in the graphic design world where now it is shown everywhere and most of it is to do with helping the community understand what is good and what is bad.

Cigarette Packaging

Smoking has been an extremely popular but bad habit for many people for more decades, and cigarette packaging has changed dramatically over the years, reflecting the shift in societal attitudes, public health policies and marketing strategies. In the 20th century cigarette packaging was designed to be appealing to the buyer with the packaging being very decorative giving the buyer a nice piece of art with every purchase, these packages included elaborate logos, bright colours, and attractive imagery to promote the brands. These designs often appealed to consumers through a sense of sophistication, luxury, and modernity (Harris, J. (2004) *Cigarette packaging*

and advertising: How graphic design helped sell cigarettes in the 20th century.). In the early age of cigarette designs they were all focused on a visual appeal using vibrant colours and a standout typography with graphic elements to create a sense of glamour and status.

However, as the years forwarded people started to notice the effects of what smoking is causing, in later half of the 20th century, the health risk associated with smoking became more widely known to the businesses the design in packaging starting to transform. This was due to the government starting to introduce health warnings and regulations aimed at discouraging smoking, this changed the whole industry into the way cigarettes were marketed. This meant that in many countries Tobacco companies were required to include health warnings on their packaging this often included images of smoking-related diseases (Bansal-Travers, M., O'Connor, R., & Tindle, H. A. (2011) 'The impact of tobacco packaging and labeling on tobacco use: A review of the literature'). This turned the famous art filled packaging into a less visually appealing packaging which showed a direct result of increased public awareness of the danger of smoking.

In the 21st century, tobacco packaging became an essential part of anti-smoking, this included several countries to implement plain packaging laws and to include images of what smoking can cause. These laws made the cigarette companies to make their packaging to be stripped of branding elements such as logos and colourful designs, and instead use a standardized format with large graphic health warnings (.Wakefield, M., Coomber, K., & Zacher, M. (2015) 'The impact of tobacco packaging and labeling on public health: A global review') The graphic design on cigarette packaging has evolved so much over the years from marketing tools aimed at promoting consumption to a

medium for communicating with the public and giving them a clear message, showcasing the causes for consumption.

Public signs

Public signs have had a significant transformation over the years, evolving in form, purpose, and effectiveness. being designed through thoughtfulness designs, these visual tools have played a massive role in the world in the role in saving lives, shaping human behavior, and fostering safer communities. The contribution of graphic designers has been a significant help in the evolution, blending artistry with functionality to help enhance and improve the impact of public signage.

The initial stages of public signs can be traced back to rudimentary symbols which were carved into stone or wood to show a message about safety or navigation. There was an issue in the initial stages of signage as this lacked consistency, relying on local symbols and languages. However, the industrial revolution ushered in the need for standardized signage, particularly urban areas, these signs became a major need for guiding Veachel's and pedestrian traffic and promoting order of safety in increasingly complex environments. The main milestone was to make the adaption of universal recognition for road signage in the 20th century this was to overcome the language barrier which was a crucial step in reducing traffic accidents globally (Global Designing Cities Initiative, 2023, Safe Streets Save Lives).

Graphic Designers have had a crucial impact in revolutionizing public signage, infusing clarity, simplicity and aesthetic appeal into their designs. The key role of Graphic Designers is mostly evident in public health campaigns and road safety initiatives.

Traffic and Road Safety

Modern road signs are designed to be noticeably clear to the public with a clear, intuitive pictogram and sharp contrast colours to ensure visibility and comprehension. The evolved signage has been likened to the reduction of traffic fatalities for example the redesigned street signs in urban areas such as Stockholms Vision Zero initiative resulted in a 40% decrease in traffic-related deaths (Global Designing Cities Initiative, 2023, Safe Streets Save Lives)

Public Health Campaigns

Graphic Designers have played a massive part in designing health information through signs and posters, for example going back to the well know pandemic in the recent years (Covid-19) graphic designers visually communicated and helped convey critical hygiene and social distancing measures. These designs did not only inform the public but also saved lives by curbing the viruses spread (UNSW Sydney, 2020, *How graphic design can help save lives.*).

Crisis Response and Historical Impact

In the 19th century, a lady named Florence Nightingale was a nurse in a hospital and wanted to highlight how effective it would be to have better and cleaner sanitation in the

hospital. She used a data visualization technique to highlight the mortality rates caused by poor sanitation in hospitals, her innovative use of charts and infographics inspired systemic changes in public health policies. (Welcome Collection, 2017, Can graphic design save your life?)

Future Directions in Public Signage

As technology improves, the public signage for our community is also improving. This includes interactive digital signage which can now provide real-time information, adapting to changing conditions and further enhancing safety. Another amazing piece of technology to improve safety is our dynamic road signs that adjust speed limits based on weather conditions and are now commonly used in developed nations.