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P Number: 2400862

Programme of Study: Graphic Design

Module: ADAD5004 Research in Practice

Task: Employ keywords to explore and identify an individual research area and related practice project, conclude with a focused research question, and write a proposal of 2500 words.

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Introduction

My three keywords are storytelling, psychology, and Futura. The first keyword, 'storytelling', refers to the notion that within design, especially brand design, storytelling is a major factor in allowing for depth and authenticity. 'Psychology' denotes to how the human brain analyses and interacts with design, looking at the theories and ideologies that form how we take in design and process it. And lastly 'Futura' refers to the history behind the typeface 'Futura', how its constructed, the opinions on the typeface through time and in the now, and its applications.

This essay will explore the meanings behind the keywords chosen in relation to graphic/brand design to conclude with how they link and my final research question.

Storytelling

The noun 'storytelling' refers to "the activity of writing, telling, or reading stories" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.), at its core it involves conveying events, messages, and ideas structurally with it being one of the primary forms of communication amongst our ancestors and in the contemporary era, used in ways to provide important information, to influence, and to engage with others. Historically storytelling was done verbally, through cave painting, and figurative imagery. As time went on, manuscripts, art, and books became a popular means of presenting narratives, with the modern era expanding into film, digital media, as well as through interactive platforms. Creating immersive experiences in the contemporary era not only conveys' narrative through the

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typical format of sound, but through seeing and doing, making for more memorable and effective storytelling experience.

At its core, storytelling revolves around visual language having meaning, this idea linking to semiotics (the study of signs and symbols) researched by many theorists, with Roland Barthes being the most influential. Barthes debated the theory that images have both denotative and connotative meanings, and that these terms describe the correlation between both the signifier and signified. Regarding design, especially branding, this concept is major in relation to a logo being more than a meaningless mark – it being a narrative tool in conveying a brands objectives and identity.

“Strong brands stand for something” (Aaker, 2014, p. 21). Regarding branding, storytelling is a major factor, with branding not simply being the product and aesthetics, it’s an identity, there to convey a brands values, story, trust and above all else, be the voice for the product or service it represents. The function of storytelling within branding tells the audience who, what, and why it exists, instils trust and memorability, allows for cohesivity, and creates differentiation – distinguishing itself from market competitors. Designers such as Paul Rand, known for his corporate branding for IBM, believed that a logo should be simple, memorable, and appropriate, that a brands identity is its ‘unspoken ambassador’. An example of a brand that encompasses these factors and reinforces its message is ‘Airbnb’.

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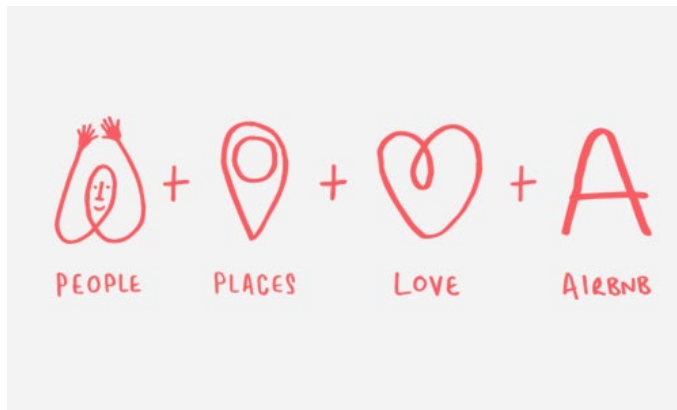


Figure 1, Airbnb, 2014, *Airbnb Belo Logo Launch – Belong Anywhere*

‘Airbnb’ centres its identity around the concept of ‘belonging anywhere’, focusing its brand on telling a story of community, culture, and connection – shifting the brand away from a purely corporate perspective of providing a service, to one of emotion and experientiality. ‘Airbnb’s’ logo – the Bélo – is designed to be a symbol of people, places, and love, as seen in figure 1, acting as a storytelling symbol of the brand, conveying its purpose both transactionally and on an emotional level. Its friendly clean forms, and warm colour scheme, create a sense of warmth, community, and approachability, aligning with the brands values of feeling at home and ‘belonging anywhere’. With ‘Airbnb’ being cohesive in their message and brand values, they align the brands narrative well, building trust and authenticity.

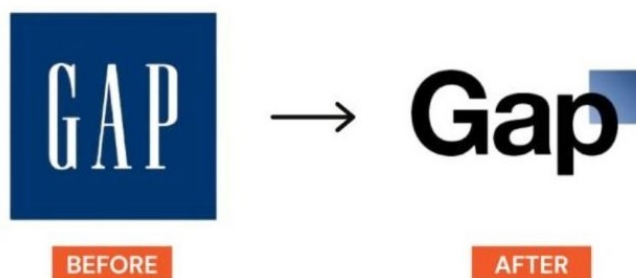


Figure 2, Krayon Story (2025) *Gap logo redesign failure comparison (before and after)*

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Juxtaposing this, the 'Gap' 2010 logo redesign shows no clear brand story and strays too far from its history, creating a sense of unease and lack of trust. The new logo, as seen in figure 2, not only erased the brand's original identity, but its narrative and message, with the redesign having almost no meaning to the brand and its values. 'Gap' stated "We chose the design because it's more contemporary and current." (Callagy, quoted in Forbes, 2010) though media retorted with comments such as "You've completely destroyed what it took 20+ years to build." (Facebook user, quoted in Forbes, 2010), highlighting just how disliked the rebrand was. Unlike 'Airbnb', 'Gap's' design lacked in having an emotional connection, feeling generic and lacking in depth, rather than engaging and speaking to its audience. With the rebrand not being supported by a meaningful message and contrasting the original so heavily, the brand lost its cohesion and purpose, disconnecting from its audience and lacking in clarity. Within a week this change was reversed, costing 'Gap' around \$100 million overall.

Ultimately, storytelling is crucial in design as it provides brands with context, clarity, emotional connection, and trust. Without it, brand identities feel lifeless and generic, lacking in the fostering of emotional bonds and memorability that is crucial to not only small startup businesses but, as shown with the 'Gap' redesign fail, across the board with already established companies.

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Psychology

Psychology plays an essential role in design as it is the roots to how design is perceived and responded to. At its foundation, design isn't simply about how aesthetic it is but about influencing perceptions and leaving a mark on the viewer emotionally. By understanding the psychological principles of design, one can create brand identities that effectively communicate character and values, better shape consumer attitudes, and leave a lasting impression.

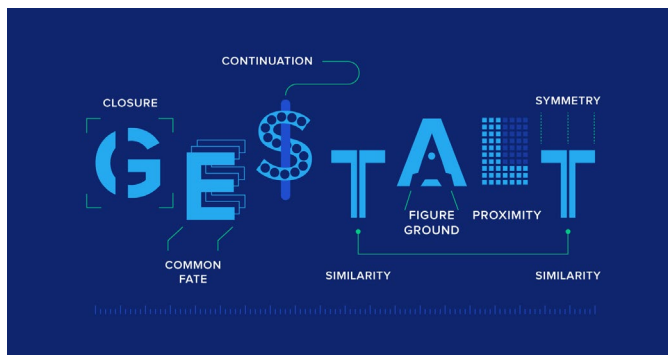


Figure 3, Chapman, C. (2018) *Gestalt principles in design*.



Figure 4, IBM (1972) *IBM logo*.

One major influential theory on psychology in design is the Gestalt theory, developed by Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Köhler, and Kurt Koffka, seen visually in figure 3 – closure, common fate, continuation, similarity, figure ground, and proximity. This theory proposes that humans naturally organise unrelated visual elements into a complete

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picture, rather than observing parts independently. Regarding branding, these principles allow designs to be easily recognisable. For example, viewers respond well to logos/ designs where they have to “complete” the shape (closure), seen in figure 4. This makes logos more engaging and cognitively stimulating, tapping into the brains need to view complex forms simply, reinforcing the memorability of a design due to the fact that one must process the design more intricately to understand it.

Cognitive fluency is also a major factor in the way people perceive visual input, with people preferring visuals that are easy to process. This may appear to contradict the gestalt theory slightly; however, I see this as that it is important to have the correct balance between simplicity and visual engagement in order to prevent overstimulation.

When a design has clarity and harmony it feels trustworthy, which is why many successful brands espouse the minimalist aesthetic. Dieter Rams is a designer, though not focused in the graphic design industry, that well represents this philosophy and is strongly influenced by modern minimalist design. Rams stated, “Good design is as little design as possible” (Rams, 1980), emphasising that clarity and simplicity over unnecessary complexity is essential. One example of this approach is with Apples branding which is centred entirely around minimalism, sophisticated typography, and a subdued colour palette. These factors all help to attribute to Apples success, reinforcing trust and modishness, well advertising their character as a brand, and attracting their target market.

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Colour psychology is one of the most crucial aspects of design, with different colours evoking different cultural and emotional responses, in turn, effecting how a brand is identified. For example, blue is often in association with reliability and trust, and red evoking senses of excitement or danger. Brands use colour to their advantage in order to align with their identity and to attract their target audience. Cohesive use of colour within a brand is crucial in strengthening recognition through association – where repeated exposure creates connections in the brain. This, over time, enables audiences to recognise brands from simply their colour, reinforcing brand identity subconsciously, even when there aren't clear brand visuals.

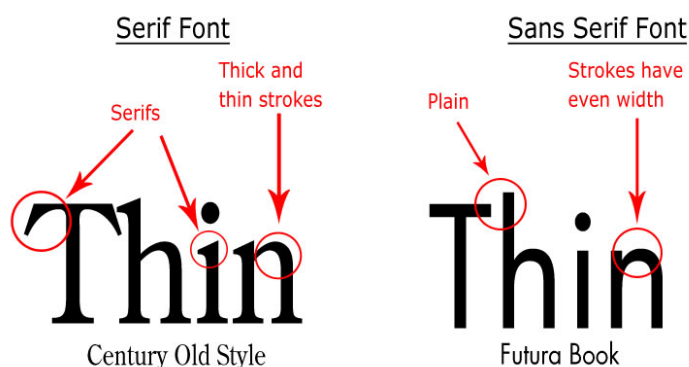


Figure 5, Amy Rae (2016) *Serif vs. Sans-Serif Fonts*

Typography is also significant psychologically. Serif typefaces (seen in figure 5) are often seen as trustworthy and traditional, whilst sans-serif typefaces (also seen in figure 5) are seen as modern and minimalistic. These ideologies are shaped by culture, usage, and exposure. Type is deeper than simply being for the sake of readability and aesthetic, with it also having emotional connotations which can strongly effect the tone of a design. These subtle influences can have major impacts of a design overall, especially

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in regard to branding as this shapes how a brand is characterised, interpreted, and the level of trust audiences will have towards them.



Figure 6, The Coca-Cola Company (1886) *Coca-Cola logo*



Figure 7, The Coca-Cola Company (2020) *share a Coke campaign advertisement*

Another example of a brand that applies psychology well is Coca-Cola. As seen in figure 6, their consistent use of their signature red colour, flowing script typography, and evocative imagery (figure 7), creates an emotional association within the audience, for example, happiness, nostalgia, and togetherness. These elements of Coca-Cola's identity are not indiscriminate and have in fact been carefully designed to reinforce the trust and positivity that the brand focuses on. The cohesivity of Coca-Cola's branding,

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strengthens memorability and emotional attachment, well conveying how psychology is a crucial foundation of successful brand strategy.

Overall, psychology is a major factor regarding brand design and how brands are perceived. By applying psychological theories, designers can create identities that not only serve their aesthetical purposes, but; convey brands' personalities, is emotionally compelling, as well as memorable. "Brand identity is about perception, what people think, and what you might want them to think". (Budelmann, K., Kim, Y. and Wozniak, C., 2010, p. 2.)

Futura

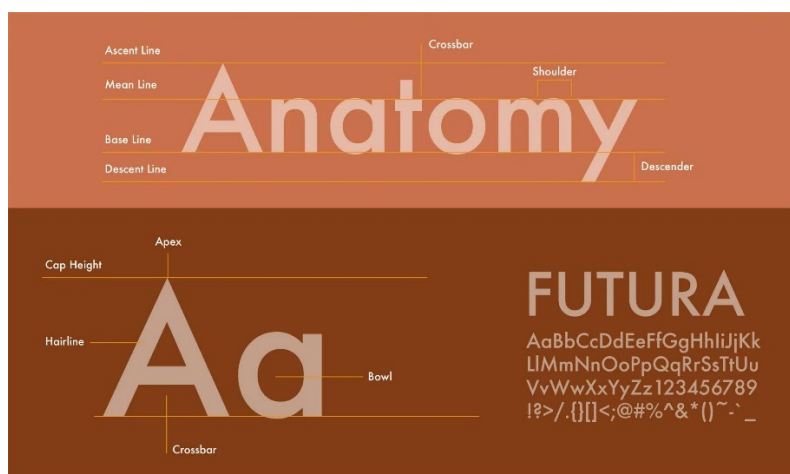


Figure 8, Extensis, Tara Storzynsky (2021) *Futura's Anatomy*

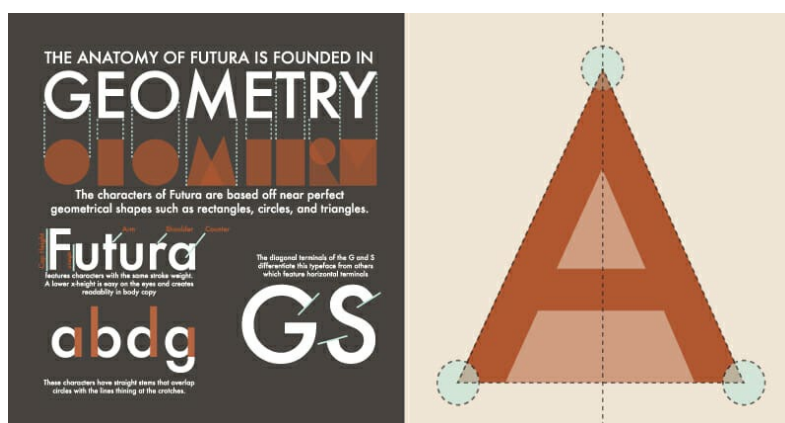


Figure 9, Vala Marketing (2019) *Futura: A Type Specimen*

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The typeface Futura, seen in figure 8, is one of the most significant typefaces of the twentieth century. Created by Paul Renner and with its release in 1927, it incarnates the modernist principles of minimalism, proficiency, and ubiquity that early twentieth century design revolved around. The success of this typeface lies not only in its legibility and aesthetically pleasing geometric forms, but in its adaptability across medias, from print to digital to branding.

Futura is a geometric sans-serif typeface constructed from simple shapes – these being circles, squares, and triangles. As seen in figure 9, all characters align with these shapes in one way or another, for example the “O”, “G”, and upper round portion of the “R” being an almost perfect circle, alongside the “M” character being made up of two triangles, with other forms such as the “E” and “T” being shaped in accordance with rectangles. Though this typeface appears to be geometrically accurate, there is a certain lack in mathematical precision in some characters where they appear more oval shaped. This, however, was done purposely to retain readability within the type, preventing it from appearing to mechanical and vindictive. Renner acknowledged these limitations to precise geometry stating that “the belief in counting and measuring leads to the grossest errors in all the arts” (Renner, P., 1922, cited in *Typografie als Kunst*, 1922). This overall highlights that although geometric precision may be seen at a glance, that in order for the typeface to be effective and legible, it must be inaccurate to an extent, relying on the human eye to achieve balance and the appearance of precision.

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Futura arose during a period of change within European visual culture, influenced by the principles of the Bauhaus movement, this being focused on minimalism – clean lines, geometric shapes, and the use of industrial materials. Although Renner was not officially associated with the Bauhaus school, he shared similar beliefs with it and the movement – that design should reflect contemporary times rather than designs of the past, and that we should instead approach typography in a way that ensures information is conveyed clearly and effectively rather than purely aesthetically, that a typeface should be “clear, impersonal, but thoroughly legible” (Burke, C., 1999, p. 195.)

The typeface was originally commissioned by the Bauer Type Foundry for the New Frankfurt housing project. This meant that the typeface was conceived as a compliment to modern architecture – this also being clean and minimalistic. This meant also reinforced the type’s ethos of being the typeface of the future, hence the name Futura – meaning future. At this time blackletter and more ornamental type governed German printing, meaning Futura posed as a break for change in the industry, aligning with the cultural shifts of industrialisation and functionalism of the era, making it the perfect cultural symbol of its time.

Futura is an effective typeface for a range of reasons, though particularly for its extensive family, clarity, adaptability, and contemporary nature. Its balanced stroke weight and lack of serifs allow for a cohesive and legible appearance throughout all medias, juxtaposing sans-serif fonts such as Garamond that may appear “uneven” and lack in clarity at times. Its minimalism allows it to be used across a variety of means such as in headlines, body copy, and even for large scale projects such as billboards

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and advertisement. With it being such a versatile typeface (not having any strong connotations historically and socially) it enables it to be used across a wide range of contexts while in keeping with its contemporary and modernist aesthetic. Uses of Futura in media include; in NASA's Appollo mission, (with it being used on the plaque left on the moon in 1969), in film making, for example in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and in corporate branding – Nike, Volkswagen, and Louis Vuitton. Contemporary Brands rely on Futura, expressing that “Futura stands for durability and timelessness” (Eisele, Ludwig and Naegele, 2017, p. 9).

Futura left a major mark on typographic history leading to the development of more modern typefaces such as Avenir (1988), and Century Gothic (1991). Its geometric forms balance well with its flexible functionality, proving the typeface to be a timeless masterpiece. This is also seen through its continued use across branding and media, still proving to be a popular typeface choice even today.

Conclusion

Overall, these keywords I feel all link well in regards to brand design and the true foundations behind ‘good’ branding, all proving to shape how an audience perceives and connects with design. Futura's clean and modernist forms reinforce clarity and trust within a brand. This lessens overstimulation and ensures that the message of the brand is understood properly, aligning with psychological principles of cognitive fluency. Futura as a typeface as well as Paul Renner, convey the importance of staying true to how design is seen visually rather than focusing on the intricacies, conveying principles

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of the gestalt theory. In conjunction with this, being able to clearly communicate a brands story, for example through defined contemporary type, evokes feelings of reliability as well as ensures that the brands narrative is conveyed unmistakably. These concepts work together ensuring that brand designs serve their purpose, meet client needs, as well as reach the target audience, this being seen through successful brands such as Airbnb and Coca-Cola as mentioned.

As these keywords work well together and have sparked my interest into the deeper theories and ideologies surrounding branding, I aim to deepen my knowledge further on the topic through the statement as follows:

“Is effective branding an objective truth rooted in psychology, or a subjective interpretation shaped by individual perception?”

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For this assessment, I confirm that I have not used Generative AI to support me in structuring my submission, including creating a draft argument structure, identifying parts and headings. I confirm that I have not used Generative AI to create text for my submission. I confirm that I have not used Generative AI for creative materials, such as images.

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