

The Public's Perception of Graphic Communication

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Abstract

Visual communications and how graphics are perceived by the public eye in various environments is an important topic for discovery. Studying and understanding the public's perception of graphics is of great importance to researchers in various fields. Delving into the concept of packaging, and specifically the packaging of various cereal brands, this investigation will research which design aspects most influence purchase decisions. Additionally, a focus in this study will be centered on age and whether a customer's age plays a role in these same purchase decisions. A literature review will investigate children's perceptions on cereal packaging while the analysis and research will center on adult's perceptions. Finally, an analysis on generational preferences will cover the inclinations of baby boomers through the mindset of millennials and into the needs of generation Z. With so many differing desires occurring over the cereal industry, much of the determination falls on the packaging and the ways in which brands market their products.

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A quick glance around you is guaranteed to show some form of visual communication and graphics. Whether it be a diagram in a textbook, an advertisement for a local grocery store, or the pictures being inserted into a PowerPoint document, visuals are essential in our contemporary media environment. It is especially important, now, to recognize the impact that graphics have. For example, Zach Kitschke (2017) says, "only 20% of what "readers" read from your text actually sticks. However, if you put that information into an image, suddenly the percentage of information takes a huge leap to 80%" (Kitschke, 2017).

Visual communication is essential to and can be seen in countless fields; from obvious areas such as marketing, graphic design, and print, to the not so obvious areas such as journalism, education, and hospitality. Organizations such as these are interested in how graphics in their communication have an effect on the public and potential customers. They are interested in knowing what will catch someone's eye and intrigue them to want to know more about these organizations. These entities are looking to cultivate an image, which graphics can give them. There is not a time that goes by when someone will see the Golden Arches and not instantly think of McDonalds. That is because a brand's identity is more than just

its name, it encompasses elements such as logos and other symbols. "Brands visual identity is essential to establishing and maintaining a presence in the marketplace...it will be possible to develop highly memorable, easily recognizable, and visual brand signals that trigger consumers to build associations between the brand itself and its chosen position" (Farhana, 2012, p. 226).

Delving into the concept of packaging, and specifically the packaging of various cereal brands, this investigation will research which design aspects most influence purchase decisions. Behaeghel (1991) and Peters (1994) emphasize how packaging influences almost all buyers at the crucial moment when the decision to buy is made, and how buyers are actively involved with packaging as they examine it to obtain the information they need, making it one of the most important mediums for communication.

Research Questions

Based off of the research, the following hypotheses have been generated for investigation:

H1: Packaging graphics have a positive, reinforcing effect on the public and leave them with a lasting impression.

H2: Designs that the purchaser perceives as good can have a lasting impression on the purchaser.

H3: Individuals are more inclined to look at and remember a product if the graphics associated with it are aesthetically pleasing.

H4: Age has an impact on perceptions and purchase decisions; the graphics that appeal to children will be much different than that of baby boomers or millennials, and vice versa.

H5: Individuals primarily base their purchase decisions off of the graphics contained on a product's packaging.

H6: Men and women have differing perceptions and attitudes towards different visual communication elements.

Literature Review

Research states that bold, unique graphics which have the capabilities of conveying a large amount of information quickly are the most effective in being retained in the viewers' memory. During a closer investigation of packaging graphics, findings from Burgess (2016) show that everything from the color to the shape of a package has the capabilities of conveying information to its viewers. In regards to the ways children perceive cereal package graphics, there tends to be a certain affinity towards spokes-characters which the children wish to be like (Visser, 2006). Additionally, elements such as brand names and pictures of the cereal product tend to stick in the child's memory, mainly because they can see that information to be valuable to them as opposed to other information provided on the cereal packaging (McNeal & Ji, 2003). While this investigation is able to provide insight on graphic communication and children's perceptions of cereal packaging, further research is required in order to have a well-rounded understanding of the public's perceptions of such graphics.

Method

The idea behind the method adopted for this analysis is similar to that of Vyas' (2015) questionnaire in that it asks participants to state their mindset toward a multitude of cereal packages. Additionally, it incorporates aspects of Sharma, Bhosle, & Chaudhary's (2012) methods by inquiring about participants' attitudes as well as their

opinions on general information presented on said packaging. Participants for this research were acquired from the Millersville University community. The research aimed at attaining participants from various ages, 18 and over, as well as equal participation from males and females. The initial section of the questionnaire asks about the demographic details of the participants, i.e. age and gender. Following this, 66 questions are asked to gain insight into their perceptions on the various cereal packages presented to them. These questions range from initial reactions, attitude towards visuals, factors that draw attention, purchase decisions, and visuals' effect on memory.

Results & Conclusion

119 questionnaires were returned by students, faculty, and staff at the university level. Of these responses, 63% were female while the other 37% were male. In terms of age, 60% of responses came from Gen Z, 13% from Millennials, 12% from Gen X, and 15% from Baby Boomers. After compiling and analyzing the data, many generalizations can be made to address the

hypotheses. Overall, it can be assumed that visually aesthetic graphics on packages will have a higher likelihood of leaving a lasting impression on the public. Additionally, from the results, it can be seen that graphics cannot solely increase the public's likelihood to purchase a product, however, they can decrease purchase likelihood for some products. In terms of age, it can be said that Gen Z holds aesthetics and package design to the highest importance compared to their older counterparts. Meanwhile, Millennials and Gen X have a moderate affinity towards graphics and Baby Boomers generally place very little importance on the graphics of a product. When discussing gender, females both perceive graphics to be important for purchase decisions as well as back that up by commenting on the aesthetic qualities of the packages they view, males, however, are not as influenced by packaging graphics. Overall, results show that graphics play a generally important role when it comes to packaging and purchase decisions and that they can convey many simultaneous messages to a plethora of audiences.

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