

Does tangible design and print hold value in the contemporary digital age?

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ABSTRACT

In the following study I have used a mix of trivial, journalistic and academic resources from relevant sources to draw a conclusion on the question posed; does tangible design and print hold value in the contemporary digital age? Explorations into the benefits of tangible design, how digital and material media is consumed, and the implications for design practice drove me to consider a range of elements to this query. These included reminiscence and nostalgia, the benefits of Lo-fi as an aesthetic choice, the freedoms that independent print media such as Zines can provide the designer and the unique sense of community that this can foster, how tangible design can be interactive in order to appeal to multiple senses and therefore create a deeper and more memorable connection for the consumer, and the unique set of benefits that come with stickers being such a tangible design media such as the appeal of free advertising and consumer freedoms of context choice. I also consider in this exploration the benefits of digital vs tangible when collaborating on a design piece. I drew the conclusion that tangible collaboration holds higher value due to more personal and time effective physical collaboration between multiple designers, however it must be said that digital collaboration brings forth its own set of benefits, such as allowing for long distance collaboration which may not otherwise be possible. When exploring how digital and tangible can be used not only for design but as tools to advertise design work and their comparable effectivity, I considered tangible design benefits such as stickers doubling as free advertising, and digital benefits such as being able to pay to reach larger audiences from broader scopes. The benefits considered by the stated explorations lead me to conclude that tangible print does still hold value in the contemporary digital age, which is proven by its still rife popularity.

Introduction

“Since the invention of the Gutenberg printing press in 1440, the printed word has stood the test of time. It has endured as a communications medium through the evolution of newspapers, radio, TV, mobile, the web and social media.” (Fernandes, 2017), I will be exploring what it is that has made printed word and design able to stand the test of time. As different mediums are created and become popular in contemporary society through the ages, it is important to observe and note that any new design medium does not necessarily take the place of those that preceded it. Different mediums will thrive at different times, depending on contemporary trends and societal structures. In the present day, we are considered to be living in a digital age.

In a time where people seem to be constantly with their smartphones, reading on their laptops/tablets rather than a book found on a dusty library shelf, living vicariously through the internet, and being alive within this digital age for humans is fast, connective and strange. Through the internet and technology like the smartphone, we are more connected than ever before. We are connected to an almost unlimited source of information, are able to call almost anyone from anywhere in the world in a click of a contact, and can entertain ourselves for hours upon hours. (Safsel, 2019)

As a species, we have reached never before seen heights with our technological advances and knowledge, after having made significant progress

in the past couple of decades. We sit at our current level of technological advancement with the knowledge that we are far from plateauing- we are presumed to continue these advancements with every coming day, unless faced with planetary catastrophe. Although not all societies are consumed by social media and technologies, many aspects of (often westernised) them are increasingly consumed by social media and technology. While we are increasingly reliant upon technology for both social and everyday practicalities, there has been a somewhat interesting resurgence in demand for tangible media:

Although print is undeniably diminishing in some areas – such as newspaper publishing and print advertising – people’s need for the tangible is leading to a revival in traditional media. Vinyl is making a comeback and sales of printed books are on the rise. According to the Publishers Association, eBook sales plunged by 17% in the UK in 2016, while physical book sales rose by 8%. The picture is similar in the US where eBook sales declined by 1.7% in 2016 with paper book sales up by 7.5%. - (Fernandes, 2017)

This is something I seek to explore, with my research having three aims. Firstly, to find out whether tangible print and design hold value in contemporary society and what aspects are contributing factors in the answer. This is something to be discussed when deciding the most appropriate media to convey your message as a Graphic Designer. I also seek to explore factors which designers must consider when choosing a design process such as collaboration, whether they do this digitally or physically, and how this affects the outcome. Thirdly, I will explore how digital and tangible mediums can be used not only for design but as tools to advertise design work and their comparable effectivity. I will explore and draw conclusions on these three main aims by using a mix of trivial, journalistic and academic resources from relevant sources to create a well-balanced argument that considers all angles of the questioned posed.

I will use the word tangible throughout this exploration rather than non- digital, because of the haptic nature of non-digital design.

Reminiscence and nostalgia opportunities in tangible design

One element that is perhaps the most essential point to look at when deliberating over why tangible design holds so much value in contemporary society

is the potential it offers for reminiscence. Robyn Lange, curator at Shutterstock, said:

Overall, when you look at the trends across the year, they reflect the fact that people feel like they are in a tumultuous time. People are tired, worn out and – although it is a cliché to say it – they are looking back to simpler, fun times. (Kemp, 2019)

This trend suggests that while contemporary society is becoming increasingly reliant upon modern technology, there is a wave of people who are questioning this reliance. Advances in technology such as the dawn of social media appear to have been a major catalyst in this attitude shift. With the mention of an iPad/tablet in *The Guardian* comes the warning, “WARNING: side effects may include: addiction, mass extinction of species, community breakdown and relationship problems” (Boyle, 2020).

And so it would seem - some research suggests that this is a mutual opinion shared by many people in the digital era. Evidence may indicate that people are growing exhausted with the digital shift in society, where face to face interaction is becoming scarcer by the day. This may have negative mental health implications due to individuals feeling a lack of ability to escape it or its pressures. On this, “Rich Salz, principal engineer at Akamai Technologies, commented that “We have already seen some negative effects, including more isolation, less ability to focus, more ability to be deceived by bad actors (fake news) and so on. I do not see those lessening. Sadly.” (Anderson & Rainie, 2018).

Social media in particular has ensured a new surge of mental illness within society sparked by the comparative nature of online socials:

Rob Reich, professor of political science at Stanford University, said, “If the baseline for making a projection about the next today is the current level of benefit/harm of digital life, then I am willing to express a confident judgment that the next decade will bring a net harm to people’s well-being. The harms have begun to come into view just over the past few years, and the trend line is moving consistently in a negative direction. The addictive technologies have captured the attention and mind space of the youngest generation. All in all, digital life is now threatening our psychological, economic and political well-being. (Anderson & Rainie, 2018)

This growing contempt for social media in a seemingly- inescapable and constantly growing digital world is a feeling that Graphic Designers can capitalise upon and use to their advantage by using nostalgia as a key tool in their work. The people who may be feeling this growing contempt towards technology the most in today's age are generally people who knew what it was like to live before the advances in technology in their lifetimes. "Shutterstock's creative trends report forecasts a nostalgic return to the visual aesthetics of the past [for the world of Graphic Design]." (Kemp, 2019). The creative trends report forecast by Shutterstock suggests why tangible design has seen a surge in popularity amongst crowds of people who wish to reminisce upon a simpler or happier time in their lives - before most media (e.g., books, magazines, newspapers, posters and advertisements) was digitised.

Although people may feel a rising contempt for the digital age and wish to reminisce back to 'the good times', this sense of nostalgia is based on entirely selective criteria. In the same way that a museum will only show a chosen context of the past, by individually selecting the exhibits to be displayed, the mind selectively chooses memories and feelings when it comes to nostalgia. "Such representations are occasions of partial recall. The most dangerous consequence of this type of museum is its effect on those who cannot remember. For them, their nostalgia is often second-hand." (Walsh, 1992). This second hand nostalgia spoken about by Walsh shows the danger of only knowing or remembering certain aspects of the past - it can cause a warped interpretation of the truth of events. In reality, there were still awful things happening back when technology was less advanced or had not yet been explored yet to the standard that it has now. People may wish for things to be more like the past because they remembered an age where they would play out in the street rather than play on their phones, whilst forgetting that in the same age there were many walks of society which were in desperate need of the type of advancement and progression which they have achieved in the modern age.

This kind of selective nostalgia also has a very biased view of technology. People remember what it was like without it, with the clouded viewpoint of its negative effects at the forefront of their minds. In reality though, these same people would struggle without it, should it cease to exist the next day. Particularly in western society, vast majorities of the public rely on google maps to navigate them to their destinations, FaceTime to talk to their loved ones in different countries, Amazon Prime to order something they left until the last minute and

Google to access information they need in seconds. Not to mention social media to satisfy a relentless need to be constantly entertained. This mental entrapment of the contemporary age is the reason many people may grow to hate technology and turn to nostalgia - can't live with it, can't live without it.

The exploration of nostalgia is not necessarily a bad thing; people's emotional attachment to that which they remember is of paramount importance. This natural interest in the past should however be used as a kind of preface to a more critical engagement with the past and its links with, or contingency on, the present. (Walsh, 1992)

This selective nostalgia that Walsh has explored can be a very useful tool for Graphic Designers when considering how they wish to publish their work. They can use tangible print as a method of playing on peoples selected nostalgia to make their work appeal more to the consumer. The feeling of holding a book, turning the pages and smelling the ink may remind the audience of what it was like to be younger and (thanks to the selective nostalgia notion that Walsh explores, where the individual romanticises about a more pleasant version of the past than the reality) happier, as books become less abundant and are replaced with online articles and Kindles. This feeling of holding a piece of design in your hand and being able to interact with it may bring back happy memories of the past because with the digital age at its contemporary peak, although tangible print is still available, it is much less abundant and easy to access than times when it was the only medium on offer.

Lo-Fi as an aesthetic choice in design

An important argument to consider when discussing why tangible print could be deemed of value in today's age is that with print comes misprints and there is, without a doubt, value held in these imperfections. As stated by Adam Harper of the University of Oxford's Musicology Thesis, Lo-Fi is a term suggesting "poor sound quality, the opposite of Hi-Fi." It can be "defined as 'a positive appreciation of what are perceived and/or considered normatively interpreted as imperfections in a recording.'" (Harper, 2014). This definition of Lo-Fi music production is a near perfect example of why there is value held in the imperfections of tangible design, as an aesthetic choice. Misprints and 'mistakes' in tangible media can be an addition to aesthetic. This aesthetic can be considered 'Retro' (which as discussed in the

previous paragraph is in an aesthetic in demand in contemporary society due to a desire to reminisce upon a 'simpler time'). Misprints are also considered valuable as they are a rarity, a complete limited edition, sometimes even one-of-a-kind. Misprints from famous brands or sought-after designers can hold large monetary value amongst collectors. Things generally hold more value the less abundant they are so this kind of limited-edition misprint value that comes with printed media is an important factor in the appeal of tangible design over digital media (which can be 'spell-checked' and proof read by technology before being published, or easily edited for corrections once published). This opportunity for misprint is attractive to some people due to the element of individuality - the feeling that the piece of design they have chosen to interact with is completely their own to enjoy and possess, and that few people (or possibly no-one else) owns the same one as them.

There is also value held in the imperfect nature of the misprint as it connects the audience to the creator. This accidental error can be the mark of a human artists hand, and can often give the consumer a more in depth connection with the piece due to the knowledge that what they now hold in their hands was once held by the author, designer or artist who created it. This kind of personal connection with the piece can hold value to the public, in the same way that people pay more for signed merchandise - it has been touched and personally created by the human hand of the artist. This added human element, that of mistakes and the value that they carry with a consumer, is something to be considered by a designer when making the choice between tangible print and digital.

The hand of the artist (or artist's hand) refers to the evidence authorship in a work of art, identified by any evidence of the artist's mark in the piece. For example, the brush strokes left in paint, the delicate modelling of a sculpture, and even the general emotive qualities of a piece (Art Term: Artist's Hand, 2020).

Anything that gives the consumer/audience an indication of the process in which the piece was made as they view it, is considered the artist's hand. There is something personal about an artist's hand, that can make the artist identifiable by the artwork alone without any credits given - pieces for example such as by Picasso or Van Gogh; their brush strokes and colour palates are very telling of who they are.

There can be vast amounts of value held in the impression of an artist's hand through misprints

and human error, but on the flip side, there can be value held in being able to remove the artist from the work - a technique which has been strived for by many an artist or creator. This idea of going against the 'norm' or tradition and removing the artist's hand (be it literally or more conceptually) is something that has been explored many times through the ages. Duchamp's 'The Fountain' is a good example of this, conceptually.

DuChamp reasoned that if you want to break all the rules of the artistic tradition then you may as well begin by discarding art's most fundamental values: beauty and authorship/artisanship. By removing completely any signifier from the work, he created art that was art only because he CHOSE it and presented it as such. (Art Term: Artist's Hand, 2020)



(Howarth and Mundy, 2000)

DuChamp displayed this removal of the artists hand perfectly in one of his most famous pieces, 'The Fountain'. The piece was conceived to be submitted to an avant-garde art show, in an attempt to make fun of his not-so-avante-garde peers in a "calculated attack on art tradition" (Art Term: Artist's Hand, 2020). DuChamp intended to completely remove the artists hand from the creation in the way in which it was made, right down to submitting it under a false name. "He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view — created a new thought for that object." (Art Term: Artist's Hand, 2020). Duchamp's work succeed in completely removing the hand of the artist in an attempt to question artistic tradition by breaking

down one of its most fundamental values, artisanship from the author.

Benefits of zines as tangible design

Zines are a type of independent publishing possessing their own set of unique characteristics and charms which cannot necessarily be replicated in digital form.

More often than not, these publications were the work of people outside the mainstream, with little or no affiliation to a university and, almost certainly, no plan for making a profit from their work. Little magazines were idiosyncratic, wild, and easy to fall in love with, no matter which writers might grace a particular issue.” (Pearson, 2020).

Here Pearson has touched on the idea that with Zine design comes endless freedoms for the creator; no limitations in what tone can be used, what topics can be covered and how they are physically bound-making for a completely personal and authentic publication every time.

Although zines generally have short press runs, it can be argued that this makes them more valuable due to the ‘limited edition’ factor. Due to being less abundant and more niche, these publications can be valued at a very substantial price. With niche subject matter comes less widespread interest amongst general crowds, but rather more focused interest from alternative crowds. These alternative crowds can often be underground social movements or cult followings of certain elements of pop culture. “Marginalised communities continue to use zines as a powerful medium to express radical ideas because they don’t have to prove an established audience or turn a profit, as with traditional publishing.” (Pearson, 2020). As is explored by Pearson, zines can be used to spread ideas or information to people who are of like-minds.

An example of Zines of marginalised voices spreading their word, and of the limited-edition nature of the publication having huge value due to their short press runs, were Riot Grrrlz’ ‘Girl Gems’.

At the start of the 1990s, a movement sprang up among young women whose feelings of frustration, alienation and solidarity were expressed through music and fanzines.” (Laing, 2013). As RiotGrrrlz emerged, they brought political zines as a much needed expression of the feminist social movement’s voice to the 90s. “A

revolution started in America. An uprising of smart, angry girls, who for a few years broadcast their solidarity and rage by way of radically homemade art.” (Laing, 2013).

This revolution saw the marriage of feminism and punk - a match made in heaven. This marriage kicked and screamed its way into the public eye by means of hand-crafted newsletters, posters and fanzines inspired by the struggles and emotions of contemporary women, ready to have their voices heard. As these zines and posters were literally handmade and reproduced by Riotgrrrlz, they were created in very limited batches and press runs. Because of the historical significance and the limited-edition factor of the original pieces, New York University Archivist, Lisa Darms recognised the market for them. “She established the Riot Grrrl Collection in 2009 at NYU’s Fales Library, gathering together archives from mostly American participants. In June, the Feminist Press published her book of the same name, a beautiful, intense compendium of reproduced zine pages, letters, stickers and drawings.” (Laing, 2013). As Darms recognised the market for fans and collectors of the movement for its historical significance, she archived originals, and produced a book of the complete collection of Riotgrrrlz. This completion of such a limited collection held such value in contemporary society that it is now available on platforms such as Amazon, Ebay and countless book stores both online and physical, as a best seller. (Amazon, 2020)

Zines “have brief lives and are often constructed of materials not designed to withstand heavy use or the passage of years.” (Pearson, 2020) which, although this could be considered an argument against tangible print and in favour of digital design as they may not withstand time, can also indicate that their value is not held in permanence but rather in their sense of community and the incomparable nature of bringing like-minded people together in the moment. The level of permanence they have could also be compared to that of digital design - although digital design may literally be able to exist as long as the URL does, one could argue that it only exists as long as it is popular. It only exists in the viewers mind for as long as it is being viewed. After viewing, they click off it and generally never see it again unless they have saved it. The existence of digital publication offers an interesting contrast in its nature of both being web-permanent and essentially a single-use item to the viewer.

“No matter how dire the predictions, the zinester spirit has remained strong. Indie creators continue to maintain their stubborn insistence on self-

published, handmade creations. As a result, zines are very much alive and filling the same crucial, cultural roles they always have.” - (Worth, 2011). The point that Worth makes rings true, and zine culture in the contemporary day is still very much alive.

Zine Culture and the community it fosters



An important element to consider when deciding whether to create in tangible zine format is the sense of community which is rife in zine culture. “Zines can be an important part of art practice in that they can showcase art in a widely distributable and accessible manner. Zine culture fosters community, sharing, collaboration and innovation.” (Weddle, 2018). As Weddle touches on, zine culture and zine community is an incredible example of a way that tangible design brings people physically together in a way that digital media simply can’t.

The rise of the underground press in the Sixties aided the arrival of ‘zine’ culture in the Seventies. Just as the democratic nature of punk taught that anyone could pick up a guitar and start a band – regardless of musical ability – DIY zine communities championed immediacy and positive action, encouraging productive acts of self-expression and self-publication. Anyone could make a zine. (Welsh, 2012)

Events held for the sharing or purchasing of zines such as zine fairs are an incomparable way to bring likeminded people together in a way that encourages conversation and creative expression, as well as collaboration in a safe space. Indeed, as Welsh stated, it made people really feel like ‘anyone’ could be creative. Tangible design such as zines or even art prints at print fairs give people something to be involved in, a community to interact with, rather than just a digital product to consume.

On the other hand, it can be argued that digital design can bring people together in both the same ways and many different ways. To begin with, in contemporary society things such as zine fairs or print fairs do bring people together over the sharing of physical, tangible design, although the internet and social media is often used to inform the public of these events in the first place. As social media is such a huge part of modern society, the easiest way to invite people to an event or spread information that an event is taking place is by starting an event page on Facebook and inviting people to it/getting people to share it and leaving it open for people to invite others, alongside online advertising with digital posters and infographics advertising the event.

The internet and technology can also be used to bring people together in totally different ways, online. The democratization of the internet means that

...more people than ever have access to technology and this in turn leads to more rapid developments and innovations within the industry. We are living in an age in which people don’t have to be experts to create their own offerings on certain platforms, and amateur developers are able to get rich from producing their own products.” This means that any individual has the power to have their voice heard and their work seen. (Irish Tech News, 2018)

There are many ways that people can come together online through different pages, websites, groups, chat forums etc. The advantage in connecting with people online is that you can do it from within your own home, and connect to someone no matter where they are in the world- this makes the connectivity between designer and audience, or designer and designer, completely limitless and without boundaries. It means that people are not required to get dressed, leave their house and travel somewhere to meet like-minded people who want to communicate about a given topic, share ideas or create together. It also means that if an individual is

interested in a niche subject, (where it may be unlikely that they live close to people who share the same interest) they are not limited to the people in close vicinity to them, but have the freedom to make connections with people all across the world with shared interests or like-minds just by searching the topic online.

After considering the advantages of both tangible design and digital design in terms of bringing people together for creative expression and events, it is safe to conclude that the clear best solution for a contemporary designer in today's age would be to utilise the advantages of both and combine their powers to achieve the best results for their design work. It can be confirmed that while tangible design has the power to bring people together in the physical world, where they can create deeper connections with like-minded individuals, online advertising is the best, cheapest and most time efficient way in modern society to make people aware of the design sharing event you might be holding (print fairs, zine fairs, magazine launches etc.) and possibly the best way to advertise your own design work.

That being said, while a combination of both digital and tangible can be applied to bring people together for such events, the argument for both sides should again be considered when pondering the most effective way for designers to collaborate when producing their work. Designers can choose to be together physically and tangibly collaborate, or they can digitally collaborate.

Collaborating in person is a much more organic and fluid way to discuss ideas with someone you wish to collaborate with - this way you can try things out together and really get a much more personal feel of the way an individual is thinking or feeling in approaching their own design work. It is the human element of picking up body language which allows you to better understand the way they work/the way they feel about going in certain directions. It can also be much more effective when working towards a goal of limited time scale - designers can bounce off one another's thoughts and ideas while receiving instant feedback and instant replies, whereas choosing to collaborate online may result in long wait times for replies on emails or messages, hindering the progress in accordance with the individual's daily routines and available time to reply. Setting out time to meet up and collaborate is the much more organic and instant way to not only work more effectively together towards a goal, but to form a more human and personable connection between individuals - which in turn often results in higher quality work.

Where meeting up to collaborate isn't an option, the internet and social media should serve as a substitute. This is the advantage of working digitally - it allows you to collaborate with designers with whom it otherwise wouldn't be possible, due to individuals being in different locations. Although this is a much more robotic, inhuman way to collaborate, certain tools online can be used to facilitate a more organic collaboration, even from different countries, such as Facetime or Skype. These real-time video call options can mimic a personal meeting with another designer online for more personal collaboration - and as an alternative, email or messenger could be used for more convenient, although arguably more robotic, collaboration.

Design that's tangible for the senses

One advantage that tangible design has over digital design is the ability appeal to every sense - visual, audible, tangible and olfactory, whereas digital which can only appeal to visual and audible.

This is a major advantage and adds to the appeal of printed design tenfold. The addition of elements which can appeal to the different senses ensures that the attention of the reader is caught and held in a way in which design on a screen simply cannot accomplish. Examples of this would be techniques which appeal to both the eyes and fingertips, embossing and foiling.

The whole point of using foil printing in print projects is so that it stands out from the competition as a more premium option. Studies have shown that the more appealing something looks, the more likely it is that consumers will pay attention. Using foil printing also means that you're creating something that demands the readers' attention while making it much more difficult to easily put down and ignore. (Fernandes, 2017).

The glossy, holographic effect created with foiling is something that not only catches the audience's attention, as Fernandes stated, by literally being shiny and attractive to look at, but it sets a piece of design aside from the rest who haven't used this technique. It brings something completely different and unique to a piece and makes it not only look more appealing and interesting to an audience but also more valuable as extra steps and money will have had to go into creating the piece with this desired effect. This is something that simply isn't possible to replicate in a digital context. You can scroll through different posters online, and

although they will all use different design techniques, colours and compositions, they will all have the same 2D, on-screen appearance.

The same goes for embossing a piece of design or a print publication. “Embossing and debossing are the processes of creating either raised or recessed relief images and designs in paper and other materials. An embossed pattern is raised against the background, while a debossed pattern is sunken into the surface of the material (but might protrude somewhat on the reverse, back side).”- (Paper Embossing, 2020)

It adds a different texture to the piece, something that not only gives the piece a literal added depth but an element to appeal to the audience’s sense of touch. This ignition of multiple senses at once helps to ingrain the experience into the audience’s mind and creates a more intimate relationship between audience and publication, rather than just clicking on a piece of online design and then clicking off it.



(Paper Embossing, 2020)

“Printed catalogues can have textured luxury paper, scented pages and those that change colour when exposed to different lights and temperatures. Reducing gorgeous images to a collection of pixels on a screen can lessen the impact you wanted them to have on your audience” (B&B Press, 2020).

Perhaps the simplest method of catching the attention of the viewer and engaging them on a more tangible experience is using textured materials, as suggested by B&B Press. Highly textured materials can add to the aesthetic of a piece, but textures can also be added to digital pieces. The advantage that textured materials have on printed design is that added layer of depth to the

tangibility of an object. It creates a new addition of interactivity for the sense of touch which helps to engage the consumer on a new level, not just visually. The textured paper feels pleasant to handle and is a more physical approach to print.

Smells can be added to papers for a more intense sensory experience but before exploring this we need to recognise that physical books and publications already have their own certain smells. People often talk about loving the smell of a book and this rings true, the glue used to bind books along with paper and ink materials which degrade overtime and...

...give off organic volatile compounds, which in turn produce a smell that’s appealing to readers. The reason the smell is so appealing may be because it has a hint of vanilla. The scientific explanation for the vanilla-ish scent is that almost all wood-based paper contains lignin, which is closely related to vanillin. (Chen, 2015).

This smell that Chen is referring to is something that cannot be experienced with digital design and often is a smell that people enjoy or find comfort in. Adding smells to paper is another way to light up the smell sense to create a more physical and memorable experience for an audience when viewing a publication. This can be done at home by adding essential oils of perfumes to paper, or more professionally with fragranced inserts or ‘scratch and sniff’ areas.

Actually the ‘scented’ paper is coated with teeny capsules that contain the perfume. These itty-bitsy containers cannot be seen with the naked eye. They can only be seen under a microscope. The capsules are made of a delicate plastic that breaks easily when rubbed or scratched. This technique is known as microencapsulation” (Kumaraswamy Thoopal, 2020).

This method *Kumaraswamy Thoopal* talks of is exclusive to physical print and cannot be used digitally, thus making it a tool in the compelling argument that is how tangible print can hold value over digital. This element is one of many which ensures the interest of the audience is captured and held with a depth which cannot be created digitally:

Tangibility. A printed page engages more senses (not just sight, but touch and even smell) than an online advertisement or email, and carries a sense of prestige with qualities that can’t be replicated on screen.

Distinctive features such as unique colours, foiling and textures can deliver a more engaging and immersive brand experience. (Fernandes, 2017).

The point Fernandes makes is a major factor in why a designer may choose to publish tangibly - to altogether deliver a more memorable and immersive brand experience.

Other examples of techniques which can be used to add a more tangible appeal to the senses when viewing a piece of design are using or printing onto paper which changes colour when exposed to different temperatures, “Thermochromic coatings change color in response to temperature fluctuations. There are two primary types of thermochromic coatings: liquid crystals and leuco dyes.” (Thermochromic Technology Products | Control Process, 2020) and printing with glow in the dark ink or ink which changes colour or effect with different lights, “When exposing glow-in-the-dark printing to fluorescent light, the ultraviolet light energizes the phosphor particles, causing them to radiate visible light or “glow” (Glow-in-the-Dark Printing | UV Coatings & More | H&H Graphics Chicago, 2020).

Benefits of Stickers rely on their tangible existence

Stickers and sticker culture is a form of tangible design which cannot be replicated digitally. Stickers hold many different values and can be used as tools by designers for multiple reasons.

Stickers are popular amongst consumers as they bring a new kind of connection with the design piece - with stickers, the audience becomes the curator. It is a different kind of connection than traditional forms of design where the audience becomes the artist by having complete control and responsibility over the context of the piece. They decide the context by choosing where and when to stick it. Changing the timing or location of where the piece will exist changes the context of the piece. This gives the audience the power to create a statement based upon the context (where/when they choose to stick it), be that political or social in nature.

Stickers are an excellent freebie. The added ‘freebie’ element of stickers make for an incredible choice for designers to give them out for free due to their low cost nature and the fact that they can be used basically as free advertising without the audience even being aware. Stickers can be easily mass produced and are perceived by audiences as higher

value than the likes of a business card; “They are viewed more as a gift than ‘advertising’. And, like promotional products, they are harder to throw away immediately and can engage the recipient... “Where could I stick this?” “Who could I give this to?” (9 Reasons Businesses Can Not Ignore Sticker Marketing, 2020). As long as the designer uses their name, signature or social media handle on the sticker provided, the user is then free to stick it wherever they desire. Wherever they stick it is, it is then left there, advertising the designer for free. Indeed, if the person sticks it on something they own, they practically become a walking advertisement for the designer in question. “Recent studies show that 90% of people trust word-of-mouth recommendations from people they know (Nielsen). Moreover, 90% of word-of-mouth about brands is taking place off-line (Keller Fay Group, 2020) Stickers are basically a word-of-mouth recommendation for the designer. “The power of stickers lies in the fact that when displayed they are not perceived as advertising at all. They are personal endorsements, recommendations and badges of support for a message, product or organization.” (9 Reasons Businesses Can Not Ignore Sticker Marketing, 2020). The fact that they are ‘personal endorsements’ rather than having to be technically held to the same standards as advertising allows for a lot of creative and political freedoms for the designer, which would not be the case for regular advertisements which must follow laws and codes of conduct. This is the same benefit that zine culture has. Independent publishing or sticker design both set the designer free from boundaries when it comes to the content. They cannot be held back by law or the moral standards of society - they are free to speak their politics, opinion and emotions without censorship. This is how sticker culture has become so prevalent within subcultures as a way for marginalised voices to spread a message or maintain a subtle presence within a city or society.

A prime, very famous example of this is Shepherd Fairey with his Andre the Giant stickers which went on to eventually birth the streetwear brand, Obey. In Shepard Fairey's early days, before he had created his multimillion-dollar brand, he created a sticker as an inside joke amongst his friends of a picture of Andre the Giant with the writing ‘Andre the Giant has a posse’ beside it. Fairey was unaware in that moment, of the phenomenon that was being born. The stickers spread like wildfire across the city becoming somewhat of a “subcultural secret handshake” (Fairey, 2014) and Fairey stated that he had found an “unexpected power in what he had created” (Fairey, 2014). Not only does this method serve as free advertising, as it did for Shepard Fairey

to raise the profile of Obey, but it creates a kind of community amongst the people using them by creating a hushed and subtle awareness of each other's presence in the city as an underlying subculture.



Interactive design used to create a deeper consumer connection

Stultified and over-saturated by the mass of visual information with which the digital age bombards us, we are crying out to rediscover the joys of tactility (or so the received wisdom goes). And by maximising the hands-on potential of print, designers can reconnect us with these pleasures and at the same time help secure the future of this much-loved medium. (Alderson, 2012).

After exploring the fatigue that contemporary society appears to be feeling with modern day technological advances entrapping us in this 'can't live with it/can't live without it' paradox, it seems that another method that designers can implement to address this with audiences is interactive design. Alderson makes a good point in that the more maximised the hands-on potential of the design, the more the audience feels reconnected with tangible design and the nostalgia that comes along with engaging with something in the same way they would have before everything became almost exclusively digital. Capitalising on exactly what technology cannot do, interactive design engages the consumer by creating design in such a way that

it begs for physical touch and movement to be readable. This immediately creates a much deeper connection with an audience through tangibility than anything ever could through a screen. "Whether it's inviting people to blow up a letter, solve a puzzle, erect a forest or play a sound" (Alderson, 2012), it engages the reader with almost puzzle-like qualities, stimulating the mind and the senses and immediately ensuring the personal connection between consumer and design is made before they even explore the content.

Discussion; implications for designers

It is unquestionably evident from my exploration of literature and contemporary culture that there are qualities of tangible design that the general public find appealing in a world where technology is ubiquitous. Members of the public who have lived long enough to see the rise of social media and other technological advances within their lifetimes use selective nostalgia to find comfort in the modern age by reverting back to things that remind them of past times. This is where it would be wise as a designer to choose tangible design to play on this nostalgia with physical print in a world which has mostly converted to digital. My research also concludes that tangible print can hold value in the digital world by means of misprint - this limited-edition factor which brings the audience closer to the author by evidence of the artist's hand, is something that is keenly sought after and collected by many. This is something that tends not to happen with digital design work.

Forms of tangible design such as zines and art prints are able to bring people together in the physical world for events such as zine fairs or print fairs. These kinds of events use non-censored independent publishing to bring together like-minded creatives in a way which is incomparable. Although digital design does not have the same communal effect, technology can be utilised to great effect in order to spread information quickly about events like this, and to make sure people are attending and aware that it's happening.

It can be debated whether a physical or digital approach should be used during the design process when designers wish to collaborate but after exploring the topic it is clear that tangible and physical collaboration is the route to go down to produce more valuable work. This human contact, when designing together, makes for a much more organic and fluid piece - rather than a robotic, digitally made collaboration. Although digital collaboration can be valuable when designers do not

have the means to be able to physically collaborate, the final result may take much longer to achieve and come out at a lower value due to a weaker marriage of creative minds for the collaboration.

Tangible print carries a certain degree of permanence which people seem to value highly - the ability to touch, own and keep something makes it attractive to people rather than the fleeting nature of digital design. The technically permanent nature of digital design (as long as the URL exists) is juxtaposed by the reality of its existence which is that it is essentially viewed as one use resource - it is to be clicked on, viewed, clicked off and forgotten about in most instances, unless saved. This level of permanence and tangibility is a good reason why tangible design is favoured over digital design, especially when buying it for yourself or as a gift for someone else.

With tangible design there are many different techniques which can be used to make for a more sensory experience for the audience, such as foiling, embossing, adding smells to paper, paper which changes colour when wet or with temperature change, using luxury textured papers, glow in the dark ink and many more. Using these techniques makes for a deeper connection between the audience and piece of design due to the inclusion of multiple senses, therefore creating a more lasting memory of the experience. This technique of pleasing the kinetic and olfactory senses is something that cannot be achieved digitally, and is a major addition to the value of tangible print in today's digital age. After much research into different types of tangible design and their strengths in the digital age, Stickers and sticker culture stand out as a form of tangible design which cannot be replicated digitally. Stickers stand as a brilliant choice for designers as they are low cost, provide free advertising (wherever the consumer chooses to stick them), add value to other pieces of design by providing a freebie when purchased, are without censorship or boundaries, and are unlike any other design method in that they turn the audience into the curator by giving them responsibility over the choice of context of the piece (where/when they will stick it). Not only that, but sticker culture has a way of creating an underground community of people who recognise some manner of shared identity in the stickers and feel the presence of the community around them. This would simply not be possible with digital design.

A final element considered in my research was interactive design, which has proved to be very valuable in today's age by offering what digital design could not - the hands-on potential of print. A

deeper connection between audience and design piece - a more memorable and sensory experience where the audience must interact with the piece personally for it to be readable. In a world where most modern design is available digitally, the existence of interactive design has been shown to be very valuable.

After much research, and with all of these points considered, it is clear to me that tangible design holds much value in the contemporary digital age. After the advances in technology in the last two decades, digital sales spiked, and then dropped, with tangible design and print making a comeback and becoming more popular again. The desire people have to reminisce on times before more recent advances in technology and to find comfort in the traditional touch and smells of printed design is ensuring its popularity rate is still rising in the modern day. Any designer would be a fool not to consider going tangible, over digital, when creating.

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