

Use of Signs, Symbols and Visuals- Sources of Communication

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Abstract- Words aren't enough and are complimented with throw of shapes and visuals when it comes to communication. Humans have a biological tendency to process words visually. Images are far better understood and retained instantly. This paper revolves around communication using symbols or visuals which came long before we used language to express feelings, ideas and thoughts. This mode of communication is considered more powerful and therefore widely used by media and enterprises. But successful communication cannot only be done through words, pictures and visuals alone, it is framed and tailored using intent and understanding. In this paper we have given a brief introduction about signs, symbols, and visuals along with their use in the communications.

Keywords—Signs, Symbols, Visuals, Communications

I. INTRODUCTION

Human brains crave for such kind of communication where visuals are used to synthesize and express ideas.

Shapes are constituted combining two end points, put together within a recognized boundary. A shape be it in any form, linear, circular, angular, geometric, open, close, big, small or in any free form, communicates its intent. There are number of shapes and combination of shape, each communicating its own meaning and message. Most of the messages behind shapes are culturally governed.

Shapes can be simple or a combination to form complex ones. Further complex could also be abstracted to make simple shapes. Different shapes are used to convey different meanings and which further is dependent on how we perceive that shape and what connection it builds up with the observer.

Designers use shapes to:

- Organize information through connection and separation
- Symbolize different ideas
- Create movement, texture, and depth
- Convey mood and emotion
- Emphasize and create entry points and areas of interest
- Lead the eye from one design element to the next

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II. MEANING OF SHAPES

Number of shapes is encountered every day and each shape communicates its own meaning. Culture has a major role to play in framing the perceptions and understanding of people in relation to different shapes.

Circles have a unique form with no defined beginning or end. This form is usually associated with some typical forms representing some as the sun, the earth, the moon and some of the celestial objects. The completeness in this form signifies infinity, unity, integrity, perfection and so on.

Circular shapes also suggest kindness, friendship, care, love, protection and affection.

Circles are graceful and their curves denote femininity. They are warming, comforting and give a sense of immense grace and love. This graceful form reflects free movement and is commonly used in designing work to attract attention, represents fullness and perfection particularly when filled with colours.

Squares and rectangles are used to denote trust and honesty. They have perfect angles and therefore represent perfection, order, stability and formality. Rectangles are the most common geometric shape encountered which suggests solidity, security and peace. They are generally not attention getters, but can be tilted to add an unexpected twist. A combination of these above mentioned figures could create master piece of design work.

Triangles can be stable when sitting on their base and are used to denote energy, aggression, inquisitiveness, power. Their stable/unstable dynamic can suggest either conflict or steady strength. Triangular shapes are also used as pointers and can represent familiar themes like pyramids, pennants, hierarchy. The strength of triangles signifies masculinity. Their dynamic nature make them better suited to a growing enterprise when designing a logo. Triangles can be used to convey succession, direction, and purpose.

Spirals express creativity and could be found in creativity of nature in the form of many organisms and therefore suggest growth and evolution. Spirals are used to express the ideas of fertility, birth, death and transformation. They could move backward and forward and represents intensiveness, concentration, and mystique.

Clockwise designs denote an intention projection and anticlockwise designs symbolize the fulfillment of an intention. Double spirals can be used to represent opposing forces.

Crosses are used to symbolize spirituality and healing. They reflect the essence of meeting of divine energies. The cross signifies centeredness, self, nature of wisdom, and higher power of being. Crosses suggest and represent emotions connected to transition, balance, faith, unity, temperance, hope, and life. They represent a need for connection to

something, whether that something could be related to relationship with group, individual, self, or project related..

The lines of cross have **vertical shape**, are seen as strong and **horizontal shapes**, are seen as peaceful.

Curved shapes are used to communicate adjustability, rhythm and movement, happiness, pleasure and generosity. They are the symbols which are more connected to femininity and offer energy, violence and, anger. **Sharp shapes** are lively and youthful and are seen as more masculine.

III. CONCEPT OF COMMUNICATION THROUGH VISUALS

The theoretical concept of visual communication is related direct rather indirect communication. For example, in case we want to communicate *heat*, we would use colours, shapes and line qualities that denotes the same meaning. The indirect communication of heat could be represented with a symbol of fire or wavy lines. To understand and interpret the communication, you would have to know what fire was, or those wavy lines are a symbol for shock or current or fire which could be connected to the word *heat*.

This type of communication is done using illustration, signs or symbols. It is considered as a fast paced, creative and challenging counterpart to basic design. Visual Communications stress more on conceptual development in comparison to perceptual qualities which can be a part other sources of communication. There can be carry-over from basic design, drawing and color. Wide use of emoticons on social media nowadays is major example of visual communication.

IV. COLOR AS COMMUNICATION

Colour is the important communication tool in-visual communication. When light strikes any object and is reflected back to the eyes, it produces colour. Colour communicates emotions. Colour symbolism can vary dramatically between cultures. For example In certain eastern cultures "RED" is generally taken as a positive color in some cultures and may signifies danger in few others. Backgrounds are taken as an important factor in visual communication. Poor visibility and effective colors are contrast is another some factors making colour, a very powerful and important communication tool; unless it is misused over used. It is connected to various religious, cultural, political and social influences. Different cultures react to colours differently. By choosing right colour for your product you can increase your sales.

V. USE OF SHAPES BY HUMANS

There are indefinite shapes available in nature and each shape has its own significance. The knowledge of shapes seems to have originated through nature only. Nature has extensive collection of plants and creatures, some of them might be unknown to humans yet. These basic elements of nature are also identified at first, through their shapes and later come their characteristics. These shapes make visuals strong and communicable. Even the text or font style which is used in communication to express something in any language, express itself differently.

Marketers or designers take the help of these shapes to express the message of brand in a style which could communicate brand attributes. Fashion or textiles also make the efficient use of these shapes as motifs or prints to reflect an identity which the buyer could relate to his personality. Similarly, architectures and interior designers use the various kinds of shapes in forming exterior and interior with uniqueness in a way which could distantly communicate the aura and also projects the reflection of and organization and its culture. Squares and rectangles pillars and designs signify strength, power and stability. Similarly, vertical shapes and lines denote strength and masculinity, dominance and power.

Above mentioned are just few examples of how humans are meticulously using these shapes to communicate or express something. But the most amazing realization comes in a fact that, we can make extensive utilization of these shapes to form a number of master pieces, full of uniqueness and synergy every time.

VI. USE OF SYMBOLS IN CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS

Human being is the only organism who has broadly utilized symbols in the form of and as mode of communication. In fact, White states that, "...All human behavior originates in the use of symbols." According to her, the symbol played an immense role in the transformation of our ape-like ancestors into the current human form. She further asserts that all forms of civilization can be credited to the use of symbols. Symbols have a major contribution in the rise of culture and also in its continuous perpetuation. Symbols have been used as a medium of expression and speech has played a very crucial role in the existence of most of the forms of social organizations. Symbols form the basis on which human behavior is dependent in its own form and also linked to symbolic behavior as well.

Tips to communicate in cross cultural environment

1. Eye contact speaks a lot about a personality. Therefore, one should never escape from making eye contact with people they meet, especially in an environment where it is taken as an important element during communication.
2. You can emphasize on your expression of friendliness through the use of laughs and jokes in your talks. Remember, too much of laughing can be considered as insensitive and thoughtless approach in some cultures that could alienate you among others. Don't overdo anything.
3. You should adopt and follow a welcoming attitude when encountering new people around you. It could involve sensible use of physical contact as a form of expression but be aware of the possibility that it can be unwanted by some people. In such cases, you generally do not touch others since you need to be observing their body movements.
4. You can interact with people of all genders but it is essential to have interaction with your similar gender first. It will give you confidence to interact with others around.
5. Colours play a crucial role, if used as a mode of interaction. Inappropriate and improper use of colours

due to lack of knowledge or incomplete knowledge of the culture you are communicating into, can create controversies in communication. This happens due to difference in perception created by their individual and cultural backgrounds.

6. Try to interact with people personally i.e., one –on-one, rather using others as a medium to communicate.
7. When you are entering into a new environment and if you are not proficient with the spoken language of that place, you can use symbols in form of body language to communicate.
8. In certain situations, when you are ambiguous about the content to throw while interacting or time and pattern of communication, it's better to stay silent and observe and interpret other's behaviour. Keep in mind that in some situations silence is also taken as part of communication.
9. Never demean the thoughts of other people. You can keep your perceptions and cultural values to yourself but always respect the cultural integration of others too.
10. Adapt the new environment rather than adopting it.

VII. CONCLUSION

When you will look around you, you will observe numerous shapes in designs and nature. You need to focus on the message they are trying to communicate to you. Every shape has a message and feel behind it. We need to spot on what they are trying to make you feel and what they are communicating. People do not necessarily have to use symbols, signs or visuals to communicate but these could be used as a way to explore ideas and/or to communicate them. It is important to use both the sides of the brain when communicating through visuals. One should be clear in his thoughts while synchronizing and communicating ideas.

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