Design for Reasonable Online Reading: Ethics for Sustainable Commerce

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Abstract

As the concept of sustainability takes root in business culture, more and more entrepreneurs realize how important it could be to measure business performance (Braungart & McDonough, 2002: 251). The fact is that most of the resources of business focus on the product itself for environmental friendly, economic growth and social impacts, but I am arguing that effective online commerce would be an extraordinary trick in the market competition. Since the influence of the Internet becomes bigger and deeper, there is no denying that a new requisition is rising for business leaders – how to balance the new tool with the traditional commercial methods. Business strategies can no longer be focused on just the bottom line, but also in the online world for a better corporate performance.

This research focuses on the question – “how can we take the responsibility for a sustainable commerce, by improving health and engendering consumers’ healthy habits”. The designer intervention in editorial products encourages consumer's attraction and improves the sales, because it adds value to the products both internally and externally (Martins, 2010: 51). This is the way in which communication design (“Icograda Design Education Manifesto 2011”, International Council of Communication Design, A Partner of the International Design Alliance) practices and design thinking move into our day-to-day operations of traditional business. The challenge today is no longer just to persuade buyers shopping in their engagement of new media, but to maintain a sustainable relationship between the sellers and consumers in the future. In the interactive world, more attention would be focused on the cultural differences of the narratives in a technological and social moment, by asking and answering the interrelations of pictures, texts, readers, genres, and interpretation.

There are two aspects that are examined for this project, respectively food’s capacity of sustainability and the visual skills of advertising. The anthropologist Igor Kopytoff suggested that objects have their own biography depending on their length of economic and cultural relevance (Kopytoff, 1984: 68). This means from checking particular food’s properties we can get a better understanding of which kind of food could be labeled as “healthy”, so that the sales strategies would definitely change compared to other foods. One case study, including three designs for branding, would be observed detailed in the project. The aim of this investigation is to compare the observation and to depict the visual analysis of different branding, from which we can see what role communication designers can take for guiding consumers. The study also clarifies whether it is a turning point of our future development in digital media from the interrelated observations into a more practical presentation.

In consequence, the implication of visuals and cultural differences in the online shopping is growing all the time. Structure of information in e-commerce, including diversity of contents, commercial values and visual elements, is considered by products’ properties from a sustainable viewpoint. This project is part of my Ph.D. studies, and still in progress.
Keywords
Communication Design, Food Commerce, Online reading, Sustainability, Health

Overview
The journalists are needed in the ‘online world’ more than before, the participants of the World Media Summit under the motto “World Media: Challenges of the Twenty-First Century” said in Moscow on July 6, 2012. In a broad ocean of information, the attractiveness of the content will become a decision factor for the consumer, they said (Kivinen, 2012). However, I’m arguing that the tendency goes in this way not so much through the insights of journalists (they do take a significant role though) as because of the capacities to categorize, arrange and present what is interesting, suitable and necessary. In recent years, across academic disciplines, arts practice and industry there has been an increasing tendency to re-situate the visual through a focus on multisensoriality and inter-textuality (Pink, 2011: 5). Even, the visual event is not a point on a network that is connected to other points; rather, it is along everyday and performative routes or narratives that people, visuals and researchers trajectories become interwoven (Pink, 2011: 7). In this case, the requirements are more and more demanding for creative workers, which means we should take more inputs into the visual legibility.

Due to diversity properties of food, widely spread consumers on the Internet, fierce competitions all over, different reading habits and cultural implications, online reading research of food and health is a quite exceptional work for traditional design practitioners. As a quite new industry, which one is more important for business expansion, consumers’ tastes, new media technologies or own development strategies? How to work out a better solution to conduct consumers to adaption in the strategies, while taking advantage of technologies well? New requirements could be better described in the following notion in the process of changing from traditional media to new media.

Impacts of improving sustainable online reading in food, nutrition and health

• People have better access to healthy food, and even gradually engender good habits in food picking.
• Improvements in the online food ecommerce affect people's feeling of shopping.
• New technologies of online commerce improve the efficiency of business both in developed locations and underdeveloped places.
• Through online communication, food suppliers can get the consumers' favorites more conveniently and quickly, so that cultural understandings are increased.

Perspectives on quality online reading

1. Think globally, eat locally.
   • How to get the most profits, within budget and in line with consumers’ expectations?
   • To what extent would traditional advertising and selling principles unduly restrict the ability of these ecommerce food chains to drive forward a substantive agenda of economic boost in the development context?
   • Can local food ecommerce chains provide the main food according to the specific situations while keeping the development sustainable, though still thinking from a global viewpoint?

2. Visual legibility and information about the food ecommerce
To what extent would visual legibility influence health improvements and consumers’ healthy habits engendering?

- Visual and structure
- Food species (content)
- Attraction of professional workforce

3. Cultural implications in food categories

- Influential element of cyber literacy, especially in the food category
- Relations between a food and a consumer

- What kind of food is labeled as “green” and which one is “junk” in society?
- How to offer acceptable “excuses” for “junk” food?
- What can be done for better advertising “green” food with a much higher price?
- What is the role of food ecommerce service in society?

Figure 1. (Wilsdom, 2001) (Gurak, 2001) (Hsu & Pant, 2000) (Zha, 2012)
In this chapter in “Computer Arts Projects” (2011), three creatives were asked to come up with a unique character to accompany a food brand. Character design is just a part of communication design practices, but it could be hard to make it work in the commercial world. The right character can give a campaign personality, featuring in adverts and on packaging for years to come, whilst a dull character would be the factor of a company’s fail.

First to take up the challenge is Norma de Leon, aka Muxxi, an illustrator and communication designer based in Guatemala City (picture 1). Her work is a collection of fantastic and surreal characters that exist in enchanted worlds full of different forms and colours. “Creating characters is always a challenge, especially when it's for a specific product”, she said. The cute character is cute, feminine and fun for a cupcake brand. In addition, her rounded forms and bright colours signify the visual aesthetics of cupcakes. Besides, the designer even took a name and her background for the character – her name is Jolly, she lives in a magical land of sweets and she loves different coloured cupcake toppings and flavours.

Next up is Bristol-based illustrator Liam Barrett. His work ranges in colour themes and subject matter, often referencing the antiquated along with inspiration from the medieval and Victorian eras. It’s really funny to see an illustration like this for an apple’s brand. Fortunately, the sad passing of Steve Jobs didn’t influence his decision. According to Liam Barrett, he was currently trying to see if his work could fit into the medium of narrative comics, so it seemed that it was more than an experiment in simplifying drawings to try and convey a message. He was heavily inspired by retro Popeye cartoons, as well as old adverts in comics. As to the colour palette, the combination of red, yellow and green works well, very eye-catching.

Last in line is Sven Hauth, a German designer and animator who works under the moniker Pixeldoggy. He specializes in 3D design and he worked at several agencies.
while teaching himself Cinema 4D in his spare time. He chose pasta for the project because it is one of his favourite foods and it was the first thing that sprung to mind. Once he had some rough ideas he modeled a library of about 20 pasta shapes in Cinema 4D and then started assembling them. Having finally arriving at a suitable composition, the next step was to create a photorealistic pasta effect. The result works quite well in such kind of renderer, just like a real pasta man ready to a conference. And it is good enough for a TV commercial – imagine him jumping into a pan.

Through the observation between three designers’ work, we can reach a convention, which would be followed by every designer when first taking the project - research on commercial characters and get some reference points for their work. In other words, cultural implication in food categories would be emphasized, such as influential elements of cyber literacy, consumers’ emotional reflections and even different sensory experiences.

Communication designers’ task is more than to draw a picture or to create a character, but to cohere, extend and reintegrate the sensory within visual discourse (Pink, 2011: 5). In this way, the visuals also recall readers’ same experiences and emotions, so that adverts really success in guiding consumers into buying the correct valued products. Such methods of engendering interaction with images improve pictures’ effectiveness by enabling them to convey meanings effectively across cultures (Bennett, 2012).

References


