Current Trends and Practices in Graphic Communication in Nigeria: A Focus on Canva

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Abstract

The use of graphics is fundamental to modern modes of communication, reflecting the need for mastery of graphic communication. Various user-friendly graphics applications and devices, such as Canva, are available on online platforms. Others include Adobe Creative Cloud, FontShop, Filestage, Adobe Edge Inspect, Computers and high-end smartphones. Despite their potential to enhance graphic content, awareness among communicators remains limited. This paper aims to identify accessible graphics applications and empower communicators to create contents independently. This paper is anchored on the Technological Determinism theory which emphasises the idea that technology drives societal change and shapes human behaviour. The research employs thematic analysis within the qualitative methodology. The theory attributed to Thorstein Veblen has been discussed and expanded upon since the early 20th century by

thinkers such as Marshall McLuhan, Jacques Ellul, and Neil Postman who believe that technology will continue to determine societal landscape including communication. This research involves in-depth interview with 10 graphic designers in Abuja, Nigeria, purposively selected among expert graphic artists. Interview questions bordered on the following: what applications are available to the communicator to mitigate issues and challenges in graphic communication; and how can those applications be accessed and used in their day-to-day efforts. Prevalent viewpoints inform the identification of actionable solutions. This study unveils a range of user-friendly graphics applications such as Canva, bridging the knowledge gap and enabling independent graphic creations.

Keywords: Graphics, Communicator, Graphic Communication, Colour Codes, Culture.

Introduction

Graphic communication, which is described by Goetsch et al (1999) as visual representation of communication concept, using symbols, glyphs, graphs, drawings, photographs, and can include the passive contributions of substrate, colour and surroundings, has gained prominence in the day-to-day communication activities. Goetsch et al (1999) further states that both the communicator and their audience appreciate that graphics offer quicker encoding and clearer decoding of the message. To be able to convey the right message, the communicator must understand how a number of factors such as culture (of the audience), colours and colour combination, fonts, typefaces among others interface in the process of creating effective communication designs. Flyn (2019) further

states that the communicator must understand the psyche of the audience in order to communicate effectively using colours and symbols. Development in graphic communication has engendered purpose-built graphics applications to make the work of the communicator easier. In a general sense, a communicator refers to anyone who engages in the act of communication. This term can encompass a wide range of individuals, including: professional communicators such as journalists, public relations professionals, marketers, writers, broadcasters, and public speakers. In an educational context, students studying communication or related fields are also considered communicators as they develop and practice communication skills. Everyday individuals who communicate in their daily life, whether through speaking, writing, or using visual media, can be considered communicators. Media creators who create contents for various media platforms, such as social media influencers, bloggers, vloggers, filmmakers, and graphic designers, are also communicators as they convey messages and ideas to an audience.

The above is in synch with Fatimayin (2018) who agrees that a communicator is simply someone who participates in the process of communication by encoding and transmitting messages through various channels to convey information, ideas, emotions, or opinions to others. Current communication patterns both on the traditional and social media make the knowledge of graphic communication important to all range of communicators especially to the professional whose responsibility is often to communicate to an audience. But the communicator is often restricted because of their limited or no knowledge of creating graphics. For instance, Ogoo (2023) says that corporate image makers depend on graphic designers, mostly sourced from outside their organisations, for

graphics. He states that although the communicator may have an idea of what to produce, their lack of exposure to the art of graphic designing makes them depend on external creatives. Depending on external creatives has its own disadvantages which includes distortion of the original idea and premature exposure of an organisation's activities. To be in total control of corporate communication, Chris Decker (2023) posits that communicators must be conversant with the rudiments of graphic communication including colour theory and socio-political environments in which they communicate.

New technologies in graphic communication such as Canva are making work easier for communication actors. Ekpe (2024) who agrees with the above statement defines Canva as a computer programme that enables one to create various designs. It is an efficient instrument for digital designing as it provides alternatives to applications such as Adobe Creative Cloud primarily used for photoshop among others. Canva which is accessed at www.canva.com or downloadable from online application stores is, according to Singleton (2023), a graphics application that lets you design professional visual materials without needing much in the way of graphic design skills. Information at canva.com indicates that Canva was founded in 2013 by three Australian entrepreneurs: Melanie Perkins, Cliff Obrecht and Cameron Adams. With headquarters in Australia, Canva about 3, 500 employees currently. Singleton describes Canva as 'gentle' in comparison with other tools such as Adobe Photoshop. Singleton's description of the ease of using Canva aligns with the thoughts of Singh (2023) who also notes that Canva can be used to create social media posts, videos, presentations, slides, posters, art, drawings and many other visual assets and a wide range of customizable templates, royalty free

images and AI features is provided to help you do this easily. According to canva.com, Canva Apps are a distinct piece of functionality inside Canva. At its most basic, Canva Apps are a JavaScript file that runs inside an iframe. This file can render a User Interface (UI) within Canva and then access a number of Application Programming Interface (APIs) to interact with the design.

The purpose of this paper is to equip communicators with the right skills and interest to be able to create their own graphics. According to the tenets of Technological Determinism theory, we are in the world driven by technology and the best approach to it would be to quickly adapt to the ever-changing world. If the communicator fails to adapt and adopt technology, they would soon be obsolete and unable to compete. This paper also draws attention to some graphic applications and explains some rudimentary approaches to graphic designing in order to assist the communicator gain more insight in graphic communication. By so doing, this paper aims to contribute to the knowledge on graphics design through the various applications and ideas available to the communicator.

This study is anchored on Technological Determinism theory which according to Mihaly (2021) originated from the thoughts of Thorsten Veblen in 18th century and expounded by researchers such as Marshall McLuhan, Jacques Ellul, and Neil Postman, from the early 1920s. Zaeid (2020) agrees with Mihaly and maintains that Technological Determinism (TD) posits that there is a relationship between technology and society. It maintains that there are links between dominant communication technology and key societal features. Although this theory has faced criticism for being reductionist and simplistic, this paper aligns with the

proponents of TD theory that man cannot run away from technology because it will continue to shape the society.

The outcome of this research will assist communicators in identifying and using available technologies in graphic communication. This study uses thematic analysis within the qualitative methodology to arrive at popular views on leveraging new technologies available to the communicator to mitigate issues and challenges in graphic communication; and on how those applications can be accessed and applied by communicators in their day-to-day effort to communicate using graphics. The methodology involves interviewing 10 purposively selected graphics designers in Abuja Nigeria and drawing conclusion from the most-held views to ascertain available solutions to the listed issues.

Scholarly Perceptions of Canva

Singh (2023) writes that there are more than 20 graphics applications suitable for the current level of advancement in other technologies in the current year. Singh lists some of the applications including Canva, Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, Xfile, InPaint among others; and says that some of the applications are available in the online application stores such Google Stores and Apple Stores, adding that some of them have free versions while others are paid for. He notes as follows:

> Whether you are an amateur graphic designer or an experienced digital artist, using the right tools can multiply your talent exponentially. A well-built graphic design software provides intuitive controls and flexibility that can be easily understood by a beginner but also has vastly

superior tools for an experienced user. Singh, A. (2023).

In the same vein, Tupper (2024) updates his own list of available graphics application to April 2024; and also includes Canva among the top on the list. He notes: "Whether you're a professional designer or just need to create beautiful digital art, these are the top graphic design apps we've tested". The list of graphics applications written by Tupper and Singh is similar to the lists of many other authors. Interestingly, one application that features in all the lists is Canva, which is why this study is focusing on Canva. Amrish Mudgal in April 2024, lists applications such as Lunacy, Mega Creator, Affinity Designer, Designer, Eagle, Gravit Designer and Pix Teller, as new technologies that graphic designers could leverage. Mudgal's list also includes Canva. Mudgal reiterates that Canva is on the following platforms**:** Web Browser, Android, iOS. Of Canva, Mudgal writes that if the user does not have previous experience in designing and looking for something very easy, then Canva is for available option. "This free online graphic design software allows you to create designs easily and quickly. There are a ton of templates, fonts images, many of which are free to use. Canva works on the drag and drop concept, where you only need to select the elements and drag it to your work area and customize it", Mudgal notes. According to him Canva requires iOS 13.0 or later and is compatible with iPhone, iPad, and iPod touch.

Canva also requires Android 6.0 or later and at least 2GB RAM. "This program does not provide you with advanced features like Photoshop. It, however, solves a beginner's design need who does not want to get into the process of learning and purchasing premium software. Canva is available as a graphic design

application that can be used in Apple and Android devices. The basic features in Canva are free. One will, however, be charged if they want to use more features in it. Writing on Canva pricing, Mudgal notes that Canva has two paid plans: Pro and Enterprise. If the user opts for monthly payment, the pro plan will cost US$12.99 per month and for yearly payment US$9.99 per month. Enterprise plan is available at US$30 per month.

Below are brief illustrations of the uses of some the application: Adobe Creative Cloud: Adobe Creative Cloud is a one stop-shop for a variety of creative tools for various creative contents such as photography, video, drawing and painting among others. The graphic designer has to subscribe to the Adobe Creative Cloud and can access various apps, web services and resources for their creative projects. Website is https://www.adobe.com/ng/creativecloud/. Singh (2023) notes that Adobe Creative Cloud has always been a blessing for all the graphic designers with its tools like Photoshop, Indesign and Illustrator simplifying the whole designing process. He notes that something new in the Adobe Creative Cloud is that allows the graphic designers to store all their favourite colour palettes, graphics and typefaces in the cloud storage and use it for their future projects. This makes it easier for the designer to access all these tools when the new project begins, thus helping in saving a lot of time. FontShop, found at https://www.fontshop.com/ deals on curated foundries of various organisations. According to information from the website, to the communicator who wants to use the exact font and font size already created, what he or she has to do is simply find access through FontShop and download the specific font and font size needed. This surely makes the task of imposing the best font with the design an easy one. Bowers (2011). Next is the Filestage.

In the designs process, the designer needs to send and get feedback on the content. Filestage found at https://filestage.io/ enables them to communicate fast. For the graphic designer, collecting clear and timely feedback from colleagues and clients could be difficult; and when responses and feedback come, sorting is also a challenge. But with Filestage, the issues would be solved or at least minimised. In the same vein, Singleton (2023) affirms that computers and high-end smartphones are equipped with creative icons a graphic designer can work with. Smartphones becomes easier for the reason of portability. Designers can use smartphones anytime, anywhere without worrying about how he could transfer his work to his computer or tablet.

Why is Canva described as 'Mild'?

Comparing Canva with other design tools described as 'traditional graphic design tools such as Adobe Photoshop or Adobe Illustrator' Singleton states that Canva's learning curve is extremely kind:

> And, although its feature set is more basic than these sorts of 'pro' solutions, its pricing is considerably lower than them too — you can get going with the platform from just $14.99 per month. In fact, there's an entirely free version of Canva available that you can use indefinitely" Singleton, C. (October, 2023).

Juist like Eze Chikezie (Personal Communication, 2023) notes, Tupper, Singh, Singleton all in 2023 agree that in essence, the core aim of Canva is to make professional graphic design easy and affordable for everyone — and, judging by its growing userbase size, it seems to be meeting that goal. Below is how Canva works:

Using **web browser,** a **mobile app,** or a **desktop app,** the communicator can access the Canva homepage which provides four key features to assist the communicator in creating designs. The key features are **templates** which are pre-designed layouts that you can use for a wide range of designs (for example, social media posts, presentations or banner ads). Another feature is the **elements** which are royalty free photos, videos and graphics that the designer can add to their Canva templates. Next feature is Canva's 'Magic Studio' **AI-powered design tools** — these let one easily generate new content for your projects (or edit your existing designs in novel ways. Number four feature is the **drag and drop editor** that lets the communicator or user move elements easily around a template. Tupper (2023) adds that Canva provides many controls for editing the typefaces and colours and custom templates.

There are three versions of Canva, according to www.slyle.com They are Canva Free (This is free of charge but it has limited access to potential of Canva; Canva Pro (This is a more sophisticated version compared to the free version. It can perform more complex tasks than the free version and cost of subscription is $15USD per month. The third version is Canva for Team which is the most sophisticated version; the cost of subscription is $30USD per month. The major disadvantage of Canva is that it relies on network available to function unlike other applications such as Adobe Photo Shop which can function offline.

Other features of Canva

Users Canva, users can generate curved texts, edit photos, enhance the image, add frames to photos, add texts to photo, record videos, trim videos, covert videos to MP4, among others. Eze (2023) notes that while the user can also generate the above effect

from other applications, what makes it easier with Canva is that the application is 'mild' or user-friendly. A curved text generator is a text 'curver' tool that allows user to generate text that follows the form of a curve or shape. Eze (2023) notes that a curved text effect creates an eye-catching visual element that gives logos, quote posters, and social media posts unique flair. One can make beautifully arched text using free curved text tool online.

Furthermore, Canva.com notes that users can access the application on mobile or desktop, and make the most of the same tools and features. "Edit from one device to another as you bend, twist, and warp text to create striking designs. Warp or bend text with our easy-to-use warped text generator. Type your text, choose a font, and move the pointers to your desired angle or direction. You can also use the Curve effect in the built-in text tool for simple arches and curves", it notes.

One of Canva desktops: Source: Canva.com

Logo created on Canva, supplied by Emeka Eze (April 2024)

Creative content designed on Canva, supplied by Joseph Okorie (April 2024)

Masthead created on Canva, supplied by Joseph Okorie (April 2024)

Tips to Assist the Communicator while Designing.

Graphic artist, Eze (2023) lists some tips as guide to assist the communicator when designer a content. He encourages users to first and foremost define the purpose and audience of the graphics. This, he says entails defining the objective of any graphic work— what does the communicator want to achieve. A content that does not have purpose is lost in the mix of other contents. Second, he advises users to "Look for Inspiration". To achieve this, he advises the communicator can study other available art work to get inspiration.

In line with Eze's thoughts, Anuforo (2023) notes that users should choose design tools that offer the best result. Here, he notes

that the communicator should selects the tool they are conversant with and which can give expected outcome. The experts also highlighted the need for users to learn the basics of designing with the tools by familiarising with the basic tools and functions of chosen design software. "One can find tutorials online or take courses to build skills; Sketch Ideas: The communicator can start with rough sketches or concepts on paper to visualize design before diving into the digital realm", Eze notes.

Users can also create a moodboard. This is done by compiling images, colours, fonts, and other elements that inspire the design. This, according Eze will help to establish a cohesive visual direction. The communicator can start by creating graphic by arranging elements such as text, images, and shapes on the canvas. Attention should be given to layout and hierarchy. In the same vein, users should choose appropriate fonts for the designs, considering readability and alignment with your overall style; pick a colour palette that suits the project and evokes the desired emotions.

The designer is to be mindful of colour psychology, balance and alignment, maintain a sense of balance and alignment in the design. Using grids and guides, Anuforo notes, helps with precision. Another important tip is to keep experimenting and revising: designing, they note, is is a learning process and the communicator should not be afraid to experiment with different elements, layouts, and styles, iterate and make revisions as needed. Feedback is also important in the process. The communicator needs to share work with colleagues or friends for constructive feedback. Fresh perspectives can help improve designs. Finalize and Export: Once the communicator is satisfied with the design, they can export it in the appropriate format for its intended use (e.g., JPEG, PNG, PDF).

Eze and Sign (2023) maintain that mastery of graphic communication requires continuously learning. This is because graphic design is a constantly evolving field. The user needs to keep learning new techniques, staying updated on design trends, and practicing regularly, build portfolios as they create more graphics. Building portfolios to showcase their work is recommended as this can be valuable when seeking design opportunities in the future.

Methodology/Procedure

This study adopted the thematic analysis, a subset of qualitative methodology. The researcher interviewed 10 graphic artists who were all in Abuja. The 10 interview respondents were selected based on their knowledge and experience in the field of graphics and designs. All 10 respondents were engaged in in-depth interviews; and were interviewed separately to ensure that nobody influences the response of any of the respondents. The questions border on finding out the user-friendly applications available to the communicator to mitigate issues and challenges in graphic communication; and how those applications can be accessed and applied by the communicator in their day-to-day effort to communicate using graphics? Thematic analysis approach was used for identifying similar codes, patterns and themes in interviews responses. The next stage was grouping and analysis of the codes, patterns and themes. Thematic analysis approach of qualitative methodology was chosen because it is the fundamental method for qualitative analysis, according Udenze and Uzocukwu (2021) citing (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is agreeable that thematic analysis is not tied to a particular epistemological or theoretical orientation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach becomes best suited for this study because this study requires expert knowledge of graphic designers

and associated principles. When the researcher was done with the interview stage, he began the theme identification and coding stage where he collated similar themes from the ten graphic artists. These similar themes were grouped in units for easy identification. This approach reduced the volume of the views expressed in interview to a manageable size. Although qualitative methodology is famed for producing believable outcome, the limitation of this study methodology is that 10 persons may not represent the huge population of graphic artists in Nigeria who could have something new to add. However, proper care was taken to ensure that the interviewed respondents were highly knowledgeable in the field.

Discussion:

Views expressed dovetail to the argument that in today's digital age, the availability and diversity of graphics applications play a crucial role in enabling individuals and organizations to create compelling visual content. Graphics applications have become indispensable tools for graphic designers, marketers, educators, and individuals seeking to convey information and ideas visually. The rapid evolution of technology has led to a proliferation of graphics applications, each offering unique features and capabilities. The above discussion is situated in the Technological Determinism theory which explores the relationship between technology and society, proposes that technological developments, fundamentally shapes and drives societal change.

Result:

After the analysis of data, this study discovered four themes on leveraging new technologies for graphic communication, focusing on Canva. The themes are: "Availability of many graphics application", "Availability of various versions of same application",

"Corporate Communicators depend on external graphic designers", "The communicator should do the graphics themselves" and "The Canva is a mild graphics application". The following section discusses these themes in detail: Availability of Canva on online stores among other graphics applications: This is one of the overarching themes on which all the interviewees made emphasis. Interviewees 1 to 10 noted that there are at least 20 graphics applications in the online application stores. This theme aligns with the position of Singleton (2023), Singh (2023) and Tupper (2023) who all listed over 20 graphics applications including Canva. This theme also aligns with the TD theory postulations which suggests that advancements in technology have a significant influence on cultural, economic, political, and social aspects of human life. Next theme is availability of various versions of same application, including Canva. For each graphic application, there are various versions. For instance, speaking on Canva, interviewee number 5 noted: "For beginners, one can choose the free versions which one does not need to pay for. Bu the free versions is limited because it does not have access to the full operations of the application. After learning with the free version, you can start subscribing with Canva Pro. Experts working in groups can use Canva Team version". This is in line with earlier discussion in the literature review that there are three versions of Canva: Canva Free, Canva Pro and Canva Team. This also aligns with one of the beliefs of TD theory that technologies possess inherent properties that influence how they are used and the impacts they have on society. These, interviewees note that these properties may include affordances, limitations, functionalities, and implications for human behaviour.

Another theme indicates that corporate communicators depend on external graphic designers. Interviewees 1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 said most of their clients were corporate image makers and noted that these Public Relations Executives depended on outsourced graphic artists to translate their ideas into graphic communication. The interviewees said that they were not communications experts, and most times, they could not produce acceptable graphics at once. Interviewee 4 noted: "Sometimes, they need to proof-read a number of times because there may be spelling errors or omission.". Interviewee 1 noted that his instinct and knowledge of colour combination and cultural environment was his major tool. He said that the choice of colours in designs plays a major role in the emotions it portrays to its viewers. This position has been affirmed by Bowers (2011) in the course of this research, who explains the relationship between colours, typefaces and effects in graphic communication. Expounding the importance of understanding the Colour Theory for design communicators, the Interaction Design Foundation (IDF) says communicators **must choose colours that reflect their design's goal and brand's personality**; and they should also **apply color theory to optimize a positive psychological impact on users.** "So, you should carefully determine how the **colour temperature (**i.e., your use of warm, neutral and cool colors) reflects your message. For example, you can make a neutral colour such as grey warm or cool depending on factors such as your organization's character and the industry", the Foundation notes on its webpage, www.interactiondesign.org

Next theme is that communicators should do the graphics themselves. Interviewees noted that some of the disadvantages of relying on external persons or even a second party within the organisation are distortion of the original message idea and

premature exposure of communication content. To avoid the embarrassment of the above situations, the communicator should know how to create graphics themselves. Interviewees align themselves with the above positions and advised that the communicator can utilise the possibilities of gentle applications like Canva. This adoption would impact on the current social structures, validating the TD theory postulation that technology shapes social structures and institutions. Technology therefore has the tendency to disrupt existing norms, practices, and power dynamics, leading to new forms of organization and interaction within society. Finally, Canva is a 'mild' graphics application. Interviewee 1 to 10 agree that Canva is 'mild' or easy to use. Canva does not require expertise in the field of graphics designing to use. This echoes the notation of Mudgal (2024) who states as follows: "If you have no previous experience in designing and you are looking for something very easy, then Canva is for you". Mudgal's assertion that Canva allows one to create designs easily and quickly as a result of tons of templates, fonts images, many of which are free to use was also re-echoed by all respondents.

Conclusion/Recommendations

In line with the postulations of the Technological Determimnism theory, available technologies will continue to influence communication trends and practices. The communicator cannot run away from technology, rather, the communicator can engage with technology for better output. Communicators will therefore work more effectively and efficiently if they are conversant with the practical know-how of graphics design. Good enough, there are a number user-friendly graphics applications online such as Canva. Unfortunately, however, graphic designers

who spoke with this researcher during separate interviews disclosed that their major clients were "corporate image makers" confirming that most communicators are not conversant with graphics communication. This calls for a re-orientation of communicators towards the awareness that there is no such thing as a perfect graphic design, rather what exist are new ways of communicating through the use of graphic design which can either take an image format or a video format. The communicator can start practising designing and get better in the process. Just like Bowers (2011) notes, graphic design is one form of art that has come to stay but would never remain static, the ability to move with the trend will keep a designer and a communicator relevant in the modern day communication industry. The understanding of cultural differences in colour theory can assist the designer in reaching a large audience with minimal rejection. Also, the use of proper images and typography would ensure an easy flow of information from the designer to the audience. It is necessary that the communicator doubles as the graphics designer to ensure that the graphic design represents the exact imagery the communicator would like to portray to the audience. User-friendly graphic communication applications like Canva can be a good place for a beginner.

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