Social Representations of Communication Design: Symbolic Universes

Maria Luísa Costa, Fernanda Daniel, Inês Amaral, and Ilda Maria Morais Massano Cardoso

Abstract The development of Design as a discipline in Portugal was slow. Therefore, only in the '80s, visual culture was implemented through Communication Design. Its rises were just at the beginning of the twentieth century, which constrain the identification of Communication Design as a specific field of Design, isolated from other areas of knowledge such as Advertising. Communication Design is strategic to conveying messages in a world that converges on visual culture. Its role in society is to facilitate informational and cognitive processes that enhance the human being's physical, neurological, and psychological behavior and the connection established with objects, others, and the world. The messages' interpretations are anchored on symbolic representations that compose collective memories, i.e., shared social construction derived from social representations validated by media and social systems. This chapter aims to explore how social representations influence perceptions of Design. We conducted an exploratory study based on the Free Word Association Test with Design students was implemented to put the analysis forward. The main conclusions refer to a central design association for Advertising, and peripheral associations for Marketing, forms of expression, and Design and media products.

M. L. Costa (✉)
Research Centre of Architecture, Urbanism and Design (CIAUD), University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal

M. L. Costa · F. Daniel · I. M. M. M. Cardoso
Instituto Superior Miguel Torga, Coimbra, Portugal

F. Daniel · I. M. M. M. Cardoso
Center for Health Studies and Research, University of Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal

I. Amaral
Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal

I. Amaral
Communication and Society Research Centre, University of Minho, Braga, Portugal

1   Introduction

Design is a comprehensive concept that encompasses multiple fields of activity, one being the Design of Communication, which is of strategic importance in transmitting messages in a world that focuses on visual culture. It has roots in Graphic Design, whose name emerged in the mid-twentieth century to define a set of practices associated with the production and publication of books and other printed pieces. In Portugal, during the twentieth century, the Design's growth follows its development: it is a slow development, industrialization is scarce, and education is neglected. In this context, Design evolves slowly. The main works are related to the propaganda of the Estado Novo dictatorship. Only in the 80s, with the formation of Designers by the Schools of Fine Arts of Lisbon and Porto and the entry into the European Economic Community, Communication Design reaches maturity and relevant importance in Portuguese society and culture.

Design is directly associated with social representations that people make of others or objects, considering that these result from the socialization process and are directly associated with collective identity and memory (Daniel et al. 2015).

This chapter aims to understand the symbolic universe of Communication Design and identify the structure of the social representations associated with stimulus "Communication Design Reminds…" among Design students. A study was carried out based on the Central Nucleus Theory (Abric 1998). This theory supports the hypothesis that all social representations are organized based on a central nucleus and a peripheral system. The central nucleus is related to collective memory, which means that groups' history is consensual and gives consistency and permanence to the representations and, therefore, are stable, coherent and rigid (Sá 1996).

2   Communication Design: Concept, Practice and Designation

Design is a comprehensive concept that describes a set of activities. According to Margolin and Côrte-Real (2014), "Design, is the process that human beings have used over time to develop the contexts necessary for their survival and progress (…) Design is the activity that results from our capacity to give answers to problems, starting from the imagination towards the action". However, this perspective of Design is distorted. Bonsiepe (2013) argues that, in public opinion, Design is identified as a wrapper, moving further and further away from the idea of intelligent problem solving, moving closer to the commercial and marketing functions.

Concerning Communication Design, the reality is not different. The communication designer's role is to develop and facilitate informational and/or cognitive processes by studying the physical, neurological, and psychological behavior of the human being and the relationship he establishes with his surroundings

(anthropometry and ergonomics). This reality is often unknown to most people, who consider Communication Design a beautification or styling process, as Bonsiepe (2013) argues, associating it with analog or digital media, which attract attention and promote trade.

This connotation is due to the permanent association of Communication Design with advertising and the creation of ephemeral and futile products, but of excellent visibility, which does not promote knowledge or improve people's lives. Whereas determinant products for the life and well-being of individuals, such as schematic indications to facilitate the use of a machine, the pagination and editing of a book, a signage system that allows us to walk safely and without mistakes in an airport or in any other space, are entirely devalued as an effective practice of Communication Design.

According to Icograda (2020), the specific areas of Communication Design activity are increasingly diversified because "Design is a constantly evolving and dynamic discipline. The professionally trained designer applies intent to create the visual, material, spatial and digital environment, cognizant of the experiential, employing interdisciplinary and hybrid approaches to the theory and practice of Design. They understand the cultural, ethical, social, economic and ecological impact of their endeavors and their ultimate responsibility towards people and the planet across both commercial and non-commercial spheres. A designer respects the ethics of the design profession".

Communication Design consists of a disciplinary area that responds to the needs of society. It is based on a theoretically grounded practice, promotes knowledge and information in a predominantly visual way, through the articulation between visual signs and verbal signs, suitable for the transmission and reception of messages, observing the most appropriate communication means and channels from analog to digital. Thus, Communication Design returns to social, cultural, and environmental needs.

Although the concept of Design is originated from the Industrial Revolution, the designation of Graphic applied to Design appeared only in 1922 when the book designer William Addison Dwiggins coined "Graphic Design" to the professional practice that created structural order and visual form in printed communication (Meggs and Purvis 2009). The term Communication Design appears later associated with the appearance of new means of communication. The terminology associated with the practice of this branch of Design is not consensual. In some cases, Design is called Communication, and in others, it is Graphic. However, we consider that Communication Design derives from the designation, still used today as Graphic Design, which according to those mentioned above and following Falcão (2018), defined the type of Design practiced as Graphic linked to the printing industry. This author also mentions that although "graphic" is not the same as "communication", both are commonly used to define the same design practice, and the second designation (Communication) places Design, to which is a more appropriate context. For this reason, Icograda, which was founded in 1963 as the International Council of Graphic Design Associations, was renamed as The

International Council of Communication Design to exhibit the development of Graphic Design within the new media environment.

3   The Twentieth Century of Communication Design

Design, regardless of the group it belongs to, originated from industrialization. In Portugal, we know that industrialization was a slow and late process, that at the end of the nineteenth century, the country continued to be predominantly rural. However, with industrialization, there was a need for the creation of specialized education. According to Santos (1997), "in 1916–1918 the Republic reformed the industrial technical education, (…) entrusting secondary education to three schools then created, industrial schools (designed to train specialized workers), schools of Applied Art (dedicated to specialized teaching of industrial arts) and schools of Arts and Trades (which provided an elementary cultural formation to empirically trained workers and craftsmen) (Santos 1997).

From the beginning of the twentieth century to the middle of the century, numerous visual communication practices, embryos of design and whose designation are decorative arts, develop. "Disciplinary awareness about design is late in Portugal," and the separation of design from architecture, fine arts, and so-called minor arts are difficult or impossible to determine (Baltazar and Português 1940). With the creation of the National Propaganda Secretariat (SPN) in the 1930s, and later named by the National Information Secretariat (SNI), a graphic expression was built based on historical evocations and moral values of political and ideological propaganda. It evolved towards a modernist aesthetic, which stimulated visual exploration and added countless artists who developed different high aesthetic quality works, such as exhibitions, pavilions, illustrations, posters, books, and scenography. These artists learned by doing (Fragoso 2012).

In 1948, the António Arroio School of Decorative Arts was re-founded, where new study plans were introduced, namely Lithographer Engraver Designer. In graphic arts, this program will allow the formation of professionals in the universe of Design. This reform was extended to the Soares dos Reis School of Decorative Arts, in Porto, where programs with the same characteristics were created (Almeida 1959).

Modernism asserts itself as a particular time of graphic expression in Portugal, where works of high aesthetic value and great names in communication design emerge. However, many are self-taught, other architects, illustrators, and painters without specific training in the area. For many decades, the profession has been closely linked to graphic arts, where professionals were referred to as graphic artists or graphic designers.

In the 1960s, with the increase in consumption, several advertising campaigns were carried out, some at the State's initiative, such as those for promoting tourism in Portugal and the promotion of Portuguese and foreign companies (Almeida and Português 1960). That is how we arrived in the '70s, with advertising and publicity

instigating the development of Communication Design, but still without higher education in the area.

In 1973, IADE created the program of studies in Design and Graphic Arts, and in 1975 the Higher Schools of Fine Arts in Lisbon and Porto created degrees in Communication Design and Graphic Arts and Design, respectively (Almeida 1959). The curricula will only be recognized in the 1980s. The recognition of the profession of the designer by the Portuguese State, with the attribution of its code by the General Tax Directorate, only happens in 2007 (Almeida 1959). The '80s are decisive in the history of Portuguese Design. The first designers are trained by higher education. As a reflection of the importance that Design assumes in the national context, the Portuguese Design Center is created. With Portugal in the EEC, there was an opening to the foreign market, free movement of people and goods, and also community funds that brought a set of problems and challenges, but also opportunities for industry, the country and Design, to which support and incentives also come (Silva 1980).

In the 90s, information and digital communication expanded and changed our visual culture. Significant national milestones promoted the recognition of Design and designers in Portugal, highlighting editorial projects such as the launch of newspaper Público or the magazines K, the launch of the Experimenta Design biennial, and the installation of the Design Museum at CCB and finally Expo98 (Silva 1980). After a long journey of development and affirmation, Communication Design reaches the twentieth century, on the rise, with the affirmation and recognition of its importance entirely assumed in the society. Much of this long journey was carried out by great professionals with no specific training in Design, stimulated and sustained both by advertising the Estado Novo regime and by commercial advertising.

Only at the end of the century with the formation of designers, the country's social and cultural opening to the world, Design, despite its connection with the promotion of consumption, peaked and recognized its value. In the twenty-first century, Communication Design incorporates new activities and behaviors that question the practices linked to advertising and promotion of consumer goods, directing its activity towards social interventions, cultural and environmental aspects, fulfilling their social responsibility to promote a better life for citizens.

4   Collective Memories and Social Representations

The process of building social representations is considered social because it occurs in a determined social context that is decisive, being composed of ideologies, values, and systems of social categorization shared through communication and its systems (Vala and Monteiro 2000; Daniel et al. 2016). It follows that the representations are social and not just shared by a group of people. Moscovici (1984) argues that modern societies' social representations are equivalent to myths and belief systems of traditional societies. Therefore, social representations are

constituted as forms of practical knowledge oriented to understanding the world and communication. Thus, representations appear as constructions of social subjects regarding socially valued objects (Jodelet 1994), contributing to collective memory construction.

Social representations are something that exists and that remains beyond the individual. Thus, Design refers to the "construction of symbolic representations shared by members of social systems inhabiting a universe of specific socialization" (Daniel et al. 2015). Social representations are a modality of knowledge that is socially elaborated and shared, contributing to the construction of a reality that is common to a social group (Daniel et al. 2016).

Collective memories arose from social representations and generational and intergenerational contexts (Amaral and Brites 2019). Corsten (1999) coined the term "We Sense" to decode the sense of presence to a group from "historical and social experiences, whether individual or collective, within the public or private sphere, allow identification with groups" (Amaral and Brites 2019). Therefore, collective memory and collective identity refer to sharing historical and social experiences (Corsten 1999), anchored to the importance of image and communication in perceptions, beliefs and attitudes (Koltay 2011). Indeed, collective memory refers to social representations about a shared past that allows the construction and maintenance of collective identity. Furthermore, social representations of History refer to collective memory, often reconstructed by media and visual environments. By considering the importance of design in its multiple aspects in the communication and creation of conceptions of the past, the visual images have a strong capacity to create social representations validated and credited by media products through persuasion, an evocation of emotions, and the creation of a sense of identification with the subject or object or value represented.

5 Empirical Study

5.1 Methodology

Based on the Free Word Association Test (FWAT), a dictionary was created, taking into account the different evocations and the respective frequencies (Table 2). The initial homogenization took into account the transformation of the feminine into male or female or vice versa, the plural in singular or vice versa, and the synonymous words written in English in Portuguese or vice versa, using as a criterion of converting the maintenance of evocations with the most significant frequency. The words were also grouped based on the etymological root. There was no concern with carrying out any content analysis. In this sense, only the words used whose reproduction had a frequency equal to or greater than three were considered.

5.2 Data Collection Instruments

The FWAT was the instrument used in this study to collect data. The Free Association allows a type of open research structured to evoke responses given from an inducing stimulus (in this study, the words "Communication Design"), which allows highlighting prominences. This study has two distinct parts. In the first part, we collected data for the sociodemographic characterization of the interviewees. In the second stage, we asked interviewees to write short answers to the inducing stimulus, which was the expression "Communication design remembers …". It was intended a direct and spontaneous production of associations or free evocations, assuming that the terms or simple words are always covered with meanings. Despite emerging from a vocabulary coming from common sense, they have an internal coherence to the emitter, revealing elements of its symbolic universe. Likewise, was taken into account the order of the words. According to Sá (1996), the order of answer is essential since, in addition to the representation's content, it allows us to know the same internal structure and organization. The Free Word Association Test, as well as the hierarchy of the evoked items, is one of the main methods of identification of the central nucleus, as that it combines the frequency of the emission of words and/or expressions with the order in which they are evoked, allowing to delimit the elements of the central nucleus, as well as those of the peripheral nucleus (Sá 1996).

In the Central Nucleus Theory (Abric 1998), the nucleus is composed of the stable or more permanent social representation elements, which are of a normative and functional nature. The functional aspects are linked to the nature of the represented object. The normative ones refer to the social values and norms belonging to the group's social environment. The peripheral system is responsible for updating and contextualizing the representation. For Flament (1994), the periphery of a social representation is considered a "bumper" between reality and a central nucleus that does not change quickly. According to the Central Core Theory (Abric 1998), a social representation is constituted as an organized and structured set of information, beliefs, opinions, and attitudes. A social representation is composed of two subsystems—the central and the peripheral-, which function precisely as an entity, where each part has a specific and complementary role. According to Vergès (1992, 2002), the four quadrants can be interpreted as follows: the first contains the most relevant elements and, therefore, possible to constitute the central nucleus. These elements are the most readily evoked and cited with high frequency by the subjects. The second and third squares correspond to the least salient elements in the representation structure; however, they are significant in their organization. In the second quadrant are the elements that obtained a high frequency but that were mentioned in the last positions; in the third quadrant are the elements mentioned at a low frequency but were evoked first. In the fourth quadrant are the elements that correspond to the distant periphery of the second periphery. In it are the elements less mentioned and less evoked firsthand by the subjects.

5.3   Participants

Participants are aged between 17 and 48 years old (M = 21.38; SD = 4.15), are mostly female (71 = 73.2%), single (92 = 96.8%) and Design students (61 = 62.9%) (Table 1).

6   Results and Discussion

Table 2 shows the indicators related to the vocabulary originally obtained (total of different words) and the vocabulary retained in two different phases. Phase 1 includes the vocabulary resulting from groupings according to the criteria described in the methodology (total of different words after grouping); phase 2 includes the vocabulary eliminating words whose frequency was less than 3.

Table 3 shows 34 different words resulting from the evocations obtained through the word association test administration. Among the most evoked words comes Advertising (41 frequencies), which presents twice the second most evoked word (posters).

Table 4 presents the Central nucleus's possible elements of the social representations of the inducing stimulus "Communication Design reminds…". The evocations in the upper left quadrant are the evocations that are probably part of the central nucleus. In contrast, the evocations in the lower right quadrant belong to the peripheral system. The rest are considered to be intermediaries.

The advertising category was the one that stood out the most in the word association test with 41 evocations. Posters' evocations, Communication, Creativity, Illustration, and Brands are also represented in the central nucleus. The peripheral system components found in the 2nd and 3rd quadrants are Peripheral Nucleus 1 and 2. In these quadrants—the upper right and lower left quadrant—we

Table 1 Sociodemographic characterization of the sample (N = 97)

	N	%
Sex		
Female	71	73.2%
Male	26	26.8%
Marital status		
Married or cohabiting	3	3.2%
Single	92	96.8%
Program attending		
Design	61	62.9%
Communication Design	17	17.5%
Global design	19	19.6%

Table 2 Associations obtained and retained

Obtained	Retained (Phase 1)	Retained (Phase 2)
185	125	34

Table 3 Categories resulting from evocations obtained from the free word association test

Categories	Frequency	$n \times$ order of evocation	Order average of evocation
Advertising	41	81	1.98
Posters	20	41	2.05
Communication	19	46	2.42
Creativity	18	45	2.50
Illustration	11	28	2.55
Marketing	11	32	2.91
Art	9	29	3.22
Brand	9	25	2.78
Typography	9	30	3.33
Ads	8	19	2.38
Logos	8	21	2.63
Aesthetics	7	24	3.43
Information	7	25	3.57
Innovation	7	24	3.43
Message	7	23	3.29
Social networks	7	19	2.71
Interaction	6	17	2.83
Internet	6	8	1.33
Magazines	6	10	1.67
Color	5	12	2.40
Graphic design	5	19	3.80
Ideas	5	13	2.60
Image	5	12	2.40
Television	5	20	4.00
Adobe	4	9	2.25
Marketplace	4	13	3.25
Wayfinding/Signage	4	8	2.00
Draws	3	9	3.00
Expression	3	8	2.67
Graphics	3	9	3.00
Product	3	9	3.00
Promotion	3	10	3.33
Videos	3	8	2.67
Visual	3	10	3.33
	274	716	94.70
	8.06		2.79

Table 4 Identification of possible elements of the central nucleus of social representations of the inductive stimulus "communication design reminds…"

Central core OMF > 8.06 OME < 2.79	Peripheral core 1 OMF > 8.06 OME > 2.79
Advertising (41) 1.98	Marketing
Posters (20) 2.05	Arts
Communication (19) 2.42	Typography
Creativity (18) 2.50	
Illustration (11) 2.55	
Brands (9) 2.78	
Peripheral Core 2 OMF < 8.06 OME < 2.79	**Peripheral Core 3 OMF < 8.06 OME < 2.79**
Ads (8) 2.38	Aesthetics (7) 3.43
Logos (8) 2.63	Information (7) 3.57
Social networks (7) 2.71	Innovation (7) 3.43
Internet (6) 1.33	Message (7) 3.29
Magazines (6) 1.67	Interaction (6) 2.83
Color (5) 2.40	Graphic design (5) 3.80
Ideas (5) 2.60	Television (5) 4.00
Image (5) 2.40	Market (4) 3.25
Adobe (4) 2.25	Draws (3) 3.00
Wayfinding/Signage (4) 2.00	Graphics (3) 3.00
Expression (3) 2.67	Product (3) 3.00
Videos (3) 2.67	Promotion (3) 3.33
	Visual (3) 3.33

AOE average order of evidence; *AOF* average frequency order

can observe the intermediate elements that can approach the central nucleus or the peripheral elements. In the peripheral core 1, we find 3 different words—Marketing is the word with the highest average order of frequency—while in the peripheral core 2, there are 12 different words, Ads and Logos are the words with the highest average order of frequency. The words located in the lower right quadrant constitute the peripheral elements most distant from the representation—Aesthetics, Information, Innovation, and Message are the words that have the highest average order of frequency.

7   Conclusion

This study intended to explore how Design students understand the symbolic universe of Communication Design and identify the structure of the social representations associated with the stimulus "Communication Design remember…". Data showed that the immediate and ephemeral visual communication character and its close connection to social, economic, and political life. It reflects, like no other

expression, the spirit of the time, that is, the trends and cultural preferences of a given time (Meggs and Purvis 2009).

Considering that the central core is related to collective memory (the history of the group), we find that advertising comes first, which is a predictable fact since much of Designers' work is aimed at promoting consumption. It is not always to trade but is generally interpreted as such. The reality is that advertising has been a source of work and value for Designers, probably due to the lack of awareness on the part of different organizations of the importance that Design can assume in solving environmental, social, and cultural problems.

From the need to counter the idea of Design associated with advertising, as well as the frequent trivial advertising practices, in 1964, the Manifesto "First Things First" is published, by Ken Garland along with 20 other designers, photographers, and students, to appeal the need for designers to concentrate efforts to direct Design towards works such as signs for streets and buildings, books, periodical, catalogs, education, and public service tasks that promote the improvement of society (Ken Garland et al. 1964). In 2000, this message was considered increasingly relevant and urgent, giving rise to a 2nd manifesto (First Things First Manifesto 2000), signed by Jonathan Barnbrook and an extensive list of Designers, Art Directors, and Visual Communicators (Barnbrook et al. 2000).

Thus, according to this manifesto (Barnbrook et al. 2000) "Designers who devote their efforts primarily to advertising, marketing and brand development are supporting, and implicitly endorsing, a mental environment so saturated with commercial messages that it is changing the very way citizen-consumers speak, think, feel, respond and interact. To some extent, we are all helping draft a reductive and immeasurably harmful code of public discourse."

This reality makes many designers feel uncomfortable with the world's view of Design and "propose a reversal of priorities in favor of more useful, lasting and democratic forms of communication—a mind shift away from product marketing and toward the exploration and production of a new kind of meaning. The scope of debate is shrinking; it must expand. Consumerism is running uncontested; it must be challenged by other perspectives expressed, in part, through the visual languages and resources of Design" (Barnbrook et al. 2000).

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