DESIGN COMMUNICATION: FASHION DESIGN STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON DIGITAL VS PHYSICAL MOOD BOARDS

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Abstract: *A mood board provides a blueprint of the design process in a particular situational design problem. With the developments in the technology the process of making and presenting a mood board has now migrated to the various digital platforms. Traditionally designers in creative world used to make physical mood boards and this has changed as some now prefer the digital mood boards. The effectiveness of mood boards cannot be overemphasised especially in the fashion design world as they provide the visual impression which is a key source of inspiration to the designer. In this study ten final year students enrolled into a fashion design degree program were interviewed to assess their perception of digital and physical mood boards. The students were given a task to respond to a situational design problem and tasked to create their mood board physically and digitally and then evaluate the process they followed in coming up with their fashion mood boards. It was revealed that many students preferred the physical method as it is more engaging to the designer and informative though it is time consuming unlike as compared to the digital mood board. It was also revealed that due to the decrease in print media as technology is advancing sources of material that can be used in developing a physical mood boards have become less especially for the students who relied heavily on printed magazines. The study concluded that students need to be taught the process of making physical mood boards first before they do the digital mood boards and also there is need to improve individual graphic design skills so that they can improve quality of their digital mood boards.*

Key words: design, fashion, mood board, students, graphics, technology

1. INTRODUCTION

Creatives strive to make their work instantly recognizable and distinguishable through being resourceful and transforming ordinary work into extraordinary works of art. In the past, designers created mood boards utilising other resources from print media such as magazines and newspapers, however due to the constant development and advancement of digital technologies in the contemporary environment, print content providers are no longer able to print magazines but rather share and sell magazines online. Print media has been around for many years, but due to technological advancements, social media has had a significant impact on how people receive knowledge and updates. People are flocking to the new technology, making it difficult for print media to actually print on large scale as the sector has been affected by advances in technology. As a result of these changes, some designers have already gradually transitioned from physical mood boards to digital mood boards, as they seek to improve communication between the designer and the final consumers of their work. A mood board, in particular, is a collage of arranged pictures, components, word, and other design features into a template that is symbolic of the final design's style and is used to generate any other form of concept design. Historically a number of designers have developed expertise in creating physical mood boards using newspapers and magazines, but due to the changing technology in the business world, a new relationship between designers and digital mood boards is starting to emerge. According to Cassidy (2011), a mood board is an essential part of the design process as it plays a role in development of the concept. The word mood board is frequently applied in a broad sense to refer to a variety of board types, each with its own set of applications. Mood boards can also be used to discretize objects and representations so that they become easily understood by the audience (Gentes, Valentin & Brulé, 2015). Endrissat, Islam and Noppeney, (2016) also state that a mood board not only sets the scene in terms of its content, but also acts as a visual and aesthetic object. A mood board that is also called a visual board is described as a sequence of photos, colors, and lettering that perfectly define the theme of a venture. That could include photos, visual representations, silhouettes, color schemes, textures, utterances, that help define the direction of one's project. Fashion mood boards were traditionally created in material reality, with magazine tear-outs, photos, and swatches pinned to a foam board, but now new technology allows a designer to now customize a mood

board to their working style and brand needs. In general, a mood board clearly lays out the creator's ethics, making it possible for the creator to create components that are compatible with the main design (Brevi, Celi & Gaetani, 2019). A mood board, on the other hand, serves as an excellent communication tool when attempting to explain the creator's perspective or notion, making it easier to find inspiration. According to Brevi, Celi & Gaetani, (2019) mood boards assist a creator in awakening their creative buds so that they have a source of inspiration. They, on the other hand, assist a client in *"getting inside a designer's head"* by displaying the designer's intended vision for a piece of work. Designers frequently use mood boards to convey their creativeness and concepts in a form of media that can be shared with others in order to visually illustrate the style that they are pursuing (Edwards, Fadzli and Setchi, 2009). In some cases designers create mood boards by trimming newspapers and or even use images that are available for purchase on the internet as these are the main sources of imagery content that can be used in making up a mood board. In todays advanced world designers are now adopting use of different computer aided design software for the development and pitching their mood board ideas. Access to a vast array of online images (the internet) and photo manipulation techniques such as blending, morphing, fading, and blurring are made possible by digital technology (Edwards, Fadzli & Setchi, 2009) and these have become key in digital mood board development. In addition, photographs are very useful for both physical and digital boards, designers frequently photograph motor shows, art galleries, and architecture for inspiration. It could be argued that mood boards can be created solely from photographs that have been tailored to meet the exact specifications.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Design Communication

Mood boards, as finished products, are important tools for communicating with all those who participate in the design process. Fashion mood boards play a role of communication in the sector as they try to answer to the design problem at every stage from product design to manufacturing. Mood boards also improve innovative abilities and innovation fluency, in addition to exploration of the fashion and content of a design's contextual perspective (Freeman, Marcketti & Karpovaet 2017). The designer have to use their artistic skills in improvising resources or materials they have at their disposal process of making a mood board and they have to look for inspirations from their creative minds to find ideas that will respond to the design problem at hand. Ultimately, by using mood boards, designers may be capable of communicating graphically and effectively what appears to be a cluster of seemingly unrelated design ideas that are difficult to articulate through text or words with similar results (Freeman et al., 2017). In addition, Cassidy (2011) explained that, designers primarily use mood boards to bring together realted material through use of visuals and images. In fashion design mood boards are common to the idea development process as they help in outlining key element of designs like colour, fabric texture and styles. Inspiration boards are critical to a design project's ultimate effectiveness. They serve as a foundation and visual direction for a project, aid in the generation of new ideas, and keep reader on track to develop consistent, cohesive brand designs and it gives the designer a sense of design creativity through the gathering of inspiration. There are also storyboards that help the designer to plan several key illustrations features derived from the inspiration board. This generally points out that these three mentioned above work hand in hand in the design communication process.

2.2 Physical and Digital Fashion Mood Board

In general mood boards, story boards and inspiration boards can be digital or physical. Traditional ones are typically made of foam that can be cut up and painted. They may take a long time to create, but they have a greater impact on the kinesthetically inclined. Digital mood boards on the other hand, are easier to create, especially when working on collaborative projects as they might very well contain videos or sounds and are made easily available online (Garner & McDonagh-Philp, 2001). Mood boards allow designers to express tough or tricky ideas and provide the opportunity for innovative discovery. Garner & McDonagh-Philp, (2001) state that a mood board is more of a collection of discovered images that are patched to a board for display purposes; sometimes found artifacts or construction methods are combined to produce a 3D visual sensation.

Figure 1: Digital Mood Board (left) vs Physical Mood Board (right)

A digital mood board is done electronically using computer softwares whereas a physical mood board is constructed out of a foam which can be cut up or painted on. The two types pf mood boards have different eefects towards the viewer and they play one role. Digital mood boards are easier to use in design communication because they can be shared electronically within a short space of time to different designers in diffrent places, whereas a physical mood board is difficult to carry around as it is usually bigger in size. A designer should be able to align and be creative enough to come up with a source of inspiration which will enbale them to critically align pictures and fabric swatches in a creative manner. The same applies to digital mood boards, for a designer to construct one, they have to be well educated on how computer aided design software works, so that the designer will be able to use the available information to create a mood board.

2.3 Steps in Making a Mood Board

According to Clancy (2022) there are certain steps that are considered in making a mood board and these steps are as follows:

1. Setting direction of the project, planning what needed to be done
2. Collecting existing material, which vary from the type of instrument being used to make the mood board, the existing material maybe from magazines or from the online media.
3. Adding inspiring imagery on the board to create a mood through pictures and colors.
4. Addition of motion and sound can be applied only if it's a digital mood board that's created using a video form. An online mood board allows you to embed examples of how movement and animation can help a piece of creative work.
5. To remain open to inspiration, requires the designer to focus and look into different ideas for new innovative inspirations.
6. Addition of color and fabric textures be it digitally or physically.

The process of making a mood boards is iterative in nature meaning one has to keep checking if it is still answering to the design problem as given.

3. METHODS

The students were given a situational design problem in the fashion design class and were tasked to come up with a physical moodboard and a digital moodboard of the same problem. They were then asked to evaluate both methods employed in coming up with the moodboards in an effort to establish their views and experiences they had in both cases. According to Cassidy (2011) moodboards can be viewed as a qualitative research tool as it seeks to explain the design using visual and text representation of the design concept or idea. The students selected for the task were final year students doing a degree in fashion design. Students in their final year will have gained experience from the first year where they learn the basics in fashion design up to the time they are expected to do their final capstone project. The process of making a moodboard is both creative and problem solving thus the process was also

monitored through use of observation method. The students were also interviewed so that they could explain some of the challenges they faced in both scenarios of making up of thee moodboards. The questions designed for the interview were both long and short open ended questions so as to allow the students to explain themselves. In the observation guide aspects like time taken and how the students sourced for material or resources to use were assessed. The observations adopted the think aloud method as proposed by Van Someron et al. (1994) and also used by Cassidy (2011) in her study on mood boards with fashion design students. The observation were done during the class time for a period of two weeks so as to allow the students to research and discuss the fashion design problem task at hand. The think aloud method allows students to critique themselves as they try to solve the problem at hand and is one of the most effective evaluation techniques for designers Wright & Monk, (1991).

4. DISCUSSION

All the ten (students) managed to produce the two moodboards and participated in the semi structured interviews. The observations done and were recorded and key points highlighted in all the practical sessions when the students came to class for the development of their mood boards. All the students managed to create their mood board in both formats that is the physical and the digital mood board. The physical mood boards are iterative in nature and during the observations it was highlighted that some students kept changing their collages up until a point they thought they are now good visual presentations. For the digital moodboards the students were allowed opportunities to explore various software they were comfortable with in making up the mood board.

4.1 Design communication

All the students managed to respond to the design problem as given. The students worked faster in making the digital mood boards unlike the physical mood board. The design problem for the fashion task was done by all the participants. During the follow up interviews one participant stated that in terms of communicating her fashion idea she preferred the physical mood board as it gave her more freedom in freely expressing her current mood as through use of texture, color, fabric and lines. She stated that "*a picture is a thousand words and I prefer having the right image that I will cut out from the magazine and paste it onto my working board together with my hand drawn sketches*".

In this study the students managed to come up with their mood boards and in other successfully managed to communicate their design ideas as this is one of the key attributes of a mood board to communicate (McDonagh & Storer, 2004). A poorly constructed mood board may not be interpreted the same way with different viewers and in this study the students preferred to add both text and hand drawn sketches to help the viewers understand their design ideas. As a design tool mood boards have to effectively try to communicate the concept without much explanation. The students also agreed that their efforts in making the mood boards was affected by the fact that in fashion it is the final product that really matters. The journey one would have gone through in the process of solving the design case might not really matter to the student but the ultimate product. This view is also shared with Gentes, Valentin and Brulé (2015) who state that rarely do students keep these mood boards as they do not view them as a final product. As a design tool to communicate the task is now left to the lecturer or teacher to formulate the curriculum in such a way that the student appreciates the role played by mood boards in design. De Wet and Tselepis (2015) proposes a framework students can use in trying to create authentic mood boards and this can also apply to both cases of making the mood boards so that owners of images used are acknowledged. Duplication of online images on the digital mood boards was highlighted as students shared similar content online.

4.2 Digital mood board in fashion

The students managed to use general creative design software such as Adobe Illustrator, CorelDraw, and AutoCAD. Other students also managed to use free mood board applications like Pinterest, Canva and GoMoodboard. From the interviews with students it was highlighted that use of these software or applications to make fashion mood boards was somehow difficult as most of the students had to learn some of the tools for the first time. Despite the easy sharing of digital files that happened amongst students sharing images to use for the task at hand most of the students argued that the detail they

would have wanted to add to make their mood boards was difficult to put across. Fashion design mood boards require more detail so that the design can be easily communicated. Digital mood board is easy to share with clients or friends but from the interviews it was noted that it has very high chances of failure in interpretation. In fashion design education the mood board is expected to reflect on the original idea of the student designer who creates his / her mood board, but the challenge that comes with the process is issue of accountability on images used. The students had challenges in working around the templates on some of the platforms and they cited that use of templates can be problematic as they do not give you much flexibility whilst at the same time you are worried of changing the template that you will have identified as the best layout. One student stated, "*The templates from the application are not working well with my design especially the imported hand rendered sketches, so I have to cut out some detail so that I can make my design fit.*"

4.3 Physical mood boards

The making of physical mood boards meant the student had to collect images from newspapers, magazines, flyers and other various sources. Due to changes in technology the print media has been on the downward trend and as such students faced some difficulties in getting wide varieties of images from different sources. From the observations students spent a lot of time making the physical mood boards as they tried as much as they could to put the detail they thought was relevant. One student participant stated, "*I have to make sure my fashion idea is well communicated so I have to add fresh leaves and grass to really put emphasis on life and sustainability of my product*". The use of mood boards in fashion helps to capture the emotional experience from different viewpoints. The physical mood boards seem to be better according to the students in capturing this emotional experience and were more detailed in presentation. During the interviews the students also highlighted that there is originality in the making of the physical mood boards thus giving the students a learning experience and ability to self-introspect their design ideas. The physical mood boards also promote realistic concepts that can easily be understood by the viewer irrespective of their lack of understanding of fashion ideas. According to Costa et al. (2003) use of the actual images in the making of a mood boards help to develop a better understanding of the design idea at hand, in this study it was revealed that though it took some time to collect or gather images to use for mood boards, that process in itself also gave the students time to do more research and even learn about other new things as they used different magazines and printed media. It was also highlighted that use of use of images alone is not adequate hence a combination of text, images and hand drawn sketches in the making up of the mood boards. As fashion design students they also argued that showing drawing skills also improves or convinces who ever will view the mood board of their particular design as there is originality and reality.

4.4 Inspiration and design thinking

The results from the interviews carried out with the students highlighted a number of important aspects covered by the moodboards. It was noted that through use of mood boards one can expand their design thinking horizon as the new ideas are generated. Through mood board one can easily understand the designers taste and preferences. Mood boards are valuable design tools as they provide communication and inspiration both to the designer and viewer hence the name interchange inspiration board. The study also revealed that mood boards if used correctly, they can become key in the recruitment process especially in fashion design sector though this is not to say they replace the resume of the applicant. Mood boards provide a room for the designer to organize the gathered visual content in a constructive way that allows a clear flow of thought process and the background inspiration. Theoretical assumptions of the constructivist theory (Knowles, 1975) on adult learning highlights that students are self-motivated and self-directed to learn. The theory also states that the passion to learn is developed through real life tasks and problems students face on a daily basis and these experiences become sources of learning. In design field the engagement with real life experience develops the student's capacity to create or come up with a new design idea. From this study through the making of physical mood boards this knowledge and experience can be gained by the students easily. In this study the students opined that in fashion design mood boards improve their analytical and artistic skills in the entire fashion design process a view also supported by (Garner & McDonagh-Philp, 2001). Digital mood boards are easily adaptable than physical mood boards as they require less time to create though skill to manipulate are key for the

students to first develop. Mood boards, in general, are designed to be quick, easy, and inexpensive to create, particularly when compared to potential errors and subsequent modifications. The primary goal of mood boards is to make the judgement call process as simple as possible. They also enable the individual to select from two or three visually pleasing strategies, reducing the risk of overburdening them. Mood boards, on the other hand, are only recommendations.

Table 1: A summary breakdown of the key marking points used in the observation guide

	Case 1 Physical moodboard	Case 2 Digital moodboard
Construction (time)	Takes a lot of time	Takes less time
Viewer engagement	Highly engaging	Depends on hardware, software and resolution of the screen
Resources	Requires a lot of resources to be put together	Just a computer with the design software
Creativity	Allows one to show their creativity	Limited or affected by the software
Effectiveness in communication	Very effective especially when viewed in person	Effective in geographically distant engagements
Sustainability aspect	Re use of discarded materials	Does not use
Resources	Need to collect images from magazines and other print media sources	Easily available online
Preference	Enjoyable and more engaging as it offers flexibility	Good to those who are good in manipulation digital fashion illustrations

5. CONCLUSIONS

Mood boards are important in the design industry in general. In the fashion industry they can assist in communication of the design. The process of developing a digital mood board was similar to that of the physical mood board though students preferred the physical mood board. In fashion design the physical mood board was found to be more expressive as it is more detailed than the digital mood board, which on the other hand is easily communicated unlike the physical mood board. Mood boards are important during the concept development stage as they dictate the project direction and once this is interpreted wrongly the viewers will fail to appreciate the design itself. In this study the students preferred adoption of the physical mood boards for the live presentations as these proffer more detail to the design thinking process. The study concludes that digital mood boards are easy to make as they require less resources but they do require the students to first develop their graphic design skills so that they can be as informative as the physical mood boards. The study also puts emphasis on the need for students to be taught the process of making the physical mood board first so that they appreciate its importance in the design thinking process and be able to then transfer this onto the digital platform. Mood boards are qualitative in nature and are important in visualizing the design idea and they play a key role in developing the student's creative thinking process.

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