

THE WAY STUDENTS USE GRAPHIC DESIGN IN RAISING AWARENESS OF COVID 19

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Abstract

This paper brings student design solution using computer graphic in order to raise awareness about the existing COVID-19 pandemic. The main idea and the goal for the students and teachers were to create a graphic solution to inform the public about the new virus and its consequences. The posters had to be conceived in a way to have a proactive and positive influence on the public. At the same time the questionnaire was used to prove the reaction of the present generation of students to such way of making us as the society conscious of the pandemic. The questionnaire was performed using social networks in order to gain answers and results regarding the student design solution as the way to confront the pandemic. Contemporary social networking sites have again proved to be the media of the generation and the means to fight through the pandemic. This paper and design solution offer another way that this social network generation would better react to. The results presented in this paper show the social engagement and digital visualization encouraged by the consequences of the disease and the effort of the students to make society aware of COVID-19.

Keywords: COVID-19, graphic design, education, information, social networks.

1 INTRODUCTION

Students and their teachers are dealing with the emerged coronavirus and the new and sudden way of teaching and learning. The pandemic has affected the educational system in an unexpected manner. Nevertheless, the students are dealing with the situation together with their mentors. Different branches of education have applied a virtual and mostly computer-assisted approach with students [1], combined with the traditional teaching.

During the global pandemic in the last two years, graphic design students of the Zagreb University of Applied Sciences had a project task through three semesters to create i.e. design "works with a message" on the protection of the health of individuals and communities. In other words, the everyday experiences of student life during the pandemic were intertwined in different and very unique ways. Together with the professors from one semester to another, the students worked on the topic they face every day and they created solutions that reach all Croatian citizens, but also all the people on the planet Earth. For graphic design students the pandemic has become not only an exceptional experience and field of professional research, but also the creation of a universal artistic metalanguage.

After capturing the essence of the phenomenon of a global health threat, i.e. the corona virus, with graphic design, this part of the research includes students' attitudes towards their role in the process and personal vision of their actions during their study. Namely, we asked graphic design students about their views on their active and engaged actions during their study.

2 METHODOLOGY

In order to collect data and information from the student the following survey was completed (Figure 1). The student had a range from 1 to 7 to state their agreement with the statements in the survey.

Student survey

I) *Socio-demographic status of students:*

Sex:
Year of study:
Previous degree completed: gymnasium/vocational program

II) *Students' attitude towards the importance of visual/graphic design in a pandemic:*

How much do you agree from 1 to 7 with the following statements?

- 1) Student works should be content-relevant and socially engaged in a pandemic.
- 2) The content and design of student papers should contribute to informing the public about the pandemic in Croatia and the world.
- 3) During my studies, I want to contribute to the understanding of social and health challenges (the importance of vaccination, adherence to measures, protection of human rights, etc.).
- 4) Visual/graphic design influences public awareness of the consequences of the SARS-COV 2 virus?
- 5) When I follow the media, do I think about visual/graphic solutions (design of comics, posters, video games, etc.)?
- 6) I want to participate in initiatives and projects of young designers with the aim of contributing to the fight against the global pandemic?

If you have any, write comments, explanations, or suggestions about the role of student design during a global pandemic. (max. 150 words)

Figure 1. Student survey with all the questions to be answered

According to the results of the survey of a total of 55 third-year students, 40 of them were male and 15 female (Table 1). According to the completed high school, most students completed gymnasium education, 54.5 percent of them, while 45.5 completed vocational education.

The questions examining students' attitudes towards the importance of visual/graphic design in the pandemic contained 6 claims. The offered answers were on the Likert-type scale from 1 to 7. The lowest values referred to the negative attitude (I do not agree at all), while the higher values referred to the attitudes of agreeing or supporting the statement (I completely agree).

The analysis of the questions based on descriptive statistics, which can be seen from Table 3, shows that the students of the Zagreb University of Applied Sciences largely agree with the offered statements. The median is 5 in three statements, indicating a high or above-average agreement with the offered statements, while the median in two statements is 4 or 3.

To the question *Student works should be content-relevant and socially engaged in a pandemic*, students answered most often with 4 or 5 ($M = 4.6481$), which indicates that most of them support this view but not fully. Also, the same way of thinking ($M = 4.5926$) is in the second statement which refers to the position on *The content and design of student papers should contribute to informing the public about the pandemic in Croatia and the world*. Male and female students agree that such issues are important.

The third statement refers to the proactive attitude of students in relation to their commitment and work during their studies: *During my studies, I want to contribute to the understanding of social and health challenges (the importance of vaccination, adherence to measures, protection of human rights, etc.)*. On this question, above-average values were achieved, but slightly lower than on the first two questions ($M = 4.2222$).

In other words, students do not dispute the importance of design in global issues and problems. However, they do not see their role as equally important.

On the next two questions, male and female students showed the highest values on the scale. Regarding the question *Visual/graphic design influences public awareness of the consequences of the SARS-COV 2*

virus, the mean value is 5.2037, while with regard to the next question *When I follow the media, do I think about visual/graphic solutions (design of comics, posters, video games, etc.)* the mean value is 5.1111. On the other side, students showed the lowest values on the last question which reads: *I want to participate in initiatives and projects of young designers with the aim of contributing to the fight against the global pandemic* by most often circling the answer below the mean scale, so the mean value is 3.2778.

3 RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and analysis of responses indicate the need for more detailed research of these trends of mean values on claims. Namely, according to the analysis of the distribution of answers, we applied non-parametric tests for the analysis of answers according to the sex of the respondents, and statistically significant differences were shown in almost all variables. The results confirm that there are statistically significant differences between male and female students, indicating that female students achieved higher values on variables that reflect the desire for self-engagement, initiative, and willingness to be more active during their studies. Female students achieved more value on the third question *During my studies, I want to contribute to the understanding of social and health challenges (the importance of vaccination, adherence to measures, protection of human rights, etc.)* than students, and on the last two questions *When I follow the media, do I think about visual/graphic solutions (design of comics, posters, video games, etc.)* and *I want to participate in initiatives and projects of young designers with the aim of contributing to the fight against the global pandemic* (Figure 2).

Based on descriptive statistical analysis, we conclude that male and female students of the Zagreb University of Applied Sciences believe that with the design the messages must be transmitted, in accordance with the knowledge they acquired during their studies and that this is necessary in the context of a global pandemic. However, they want to emphasize less their role in that process. Such attitude differs by gender and female students consider their own engagement and proactivity an important segment of student work and experience.

The survey also included an open-ended question: Write comments, explanations, or suggestions about the role of student design during a global pandemic. The answers of male and female students are in accordance with the obtained quantitative results of the survey and indicate the fact that it is desirable to base the students' work on current global issues. This is confirmed by the following quote:

It is positive that student design is based on current topics and trends in the world such as the global pandemic because it prepares us for professional life after academic education.

A certain, but smaller number of students believe that the study of design should not reflect the current situation in society and that it should not refer at all to the problems that the community is facing, as in this quote:

The study program design at the faculty should have nothing to do with current events in the world. The focus should be on educating future designers and providing them with up-to-date education relevant to their future careers in design.

Despite the restraint of a smaller number of students in the current circumstances as a source of inspiration and innovative solutions, comments of the largest number of student indicate the uniqueness of the moment in which they live and study and the possibility of interdisciplinary upgrading their knowledge and experience, for example:

I agree that students should learn how to express themselves in the world of graphic design and send a message about the new situation through medical education.

or

Student solutions should focus on scientifically informing the public about medicine, such as how vaccines work.

However, studying in the circumstances of a global pandemic is an extremely demanding process and that is why many students warn that they would be happy to return to their student benches. Namely, in a pandemic, not only health is a problem, but also the way of learning and mastering the knowledge and techniques necessary for further work and development:

The role of student design during the global pandemic could be to draw attention to the fact that students still need education, not under masks and without air but in the normal way as before, and that such conditions are needed in some way to be enabled to all students.

The importance of design in this research has shown the awareness of students in Croatia, who believe that..

students can help understand the gravity of this pandemic with their design solutions. Because people will notice a good poster sooner than, for example, an article in some newspaper.

But also, the desire for new approaches and creative solutions in which they participate equally in the academic community, as well as in the general public.

I believe that students, especially those associated with the design profession, should be maximally engaged in spreading awareness around the pandemic. Student ideas are always welcome because they are far more familiar with the trends among young people, so I can more easily connect them with the message we need to send to everyone. With the mutual cooperation of students and people who have been in this profession for a long time, it will be easier to create the right message that will reach all of us.

Based on this quote, it can be concluded that the next step in creating graphic design study during pandemic conditions is to connect to interdisciplinary and international networks as a very motivating step for the benefit of all, students, teachers, and communities.

Table.1 Distribution according to gender

	Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	15	27,3	27,3	27,3
	Male	40	72,7	72,7	100,0
	Total	55	100,0	100,0	

Table.2 Distribution according to the type of graduated school among students

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Gymnasium	30	54,5	54,5	54,5
	Vocational	25	45,5	45,5	100,0
	Total	55	100,0	100,0	

Table 3. Mean values of the Items in Scale

	<i>Student works should be content-relevant and socially engaged in a pandemic.</i>	<i>The content and design of student papers should contribute to informing the public about the pandemic in Croatia and the world.</i>	<i>During my studies, I want to contribute to the understanding of social and health challenges (the importance of vaccination, adherence to measures, protection of human rights, etc.).</i>	<i>Visual/graphic design influences public awareness of the consequences of the SARS-COV 2 virus</i>	<i>When I follow the media, do I think about visual/graphic solutions (design of comics, posters, video games, etc.)?</i>	<i>I want to participate in initiatives and projects of young designers with the aim of contributing to the fight against the global pandemic?</i>
N	54	54	54	54	54	54
	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	4,6481	4,5926	4,2222	5,2037	5,1111	3,2778
Median	5,0000	5,0000	4,0000	5,0000	5,5000	3,0000
Minimum	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00
Maximum	7,00	7,00	7,00	7,00	7,00	7,00

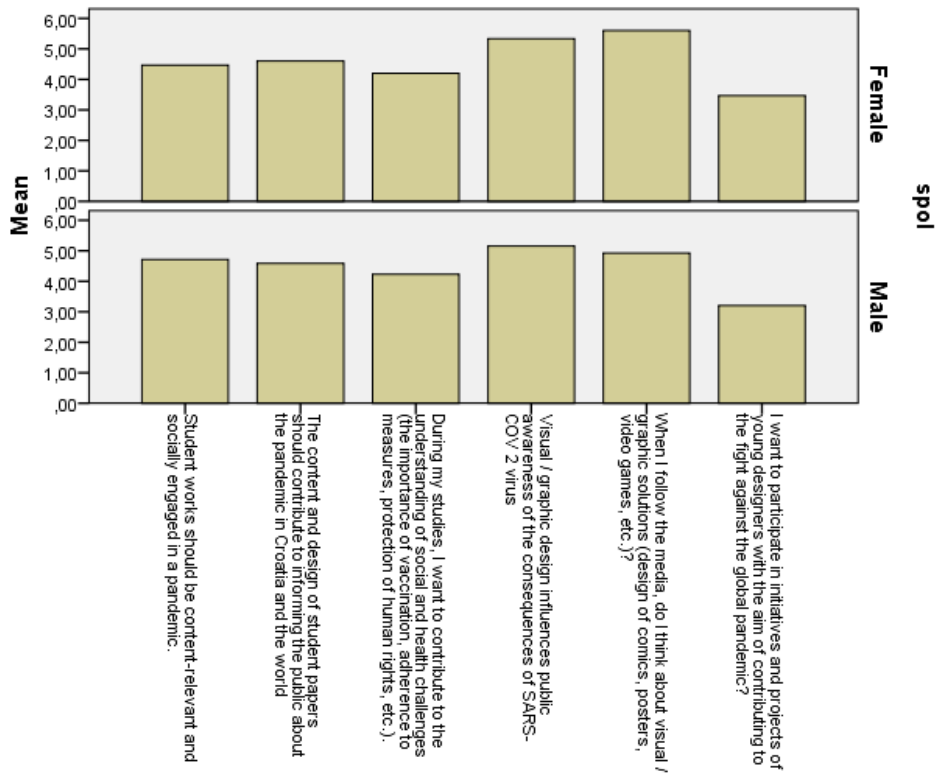


Figure 2. Mean values of the items in scale according to gender

4 POSTER DESIGN RAISING AWARENES ABOUT COVID-19

The student posters show the ability of inspiring. The goal of this task was to make a poster in order to motivate people to start thinking about the pandemics we are all in and to raise awareness about people caring about each other. At the same time, the task encourages students to think reflexively and to actively articulate their attitude and opinion in the context of the present situation they are experiencing [3, 4]. With their design, form, content, presentation and even words, the posters express consciousness, conscientiousness, awareness and support (Fig. 3, 4). The student posters show the ability of inspiring.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.

5 CONCLUSION

The students implemented their knowledge, skills and experiences to make their statement about the today's pandemic.

The reflections of the students have been presented in the questionnaire with words and statistics. The students have expressed their reflections and attitudes through poster design, since one of the main characteristics of the graphic design is using positive thinking to encourage creative reactions [5]. The design of the theme poster implied students' research and interest about the topic of the pandemics. The students have conducted research by themselves and gathered information and data related to the content, processes and procedures of poster realization. The final stage is a design and creation of the poster. The key problem of the design is good communication between the designer and target group in order to encourage reflection and to start changes in the behavior.

It is important to emphasize that the posters in this paper are not a tool in the hands of advertisers, protesters and other groups that convey messages to the target group, but the students' reflexive action works which entirely meet the criteria of an activist poster. The posters in this paper present the way in which the students see the situation with the pandemics.

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