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Symbolism as the Language of Millennials

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Abstract

This paper is a linguistic analysis of symbols in regard to marketing strategies becoming relevant to the Millennial generation. This study aims to examine how technological advances affect Millennial characteristics and behaviors and contribute to the growing phenomenon of visual literacy. Research on the topic was synthesized and used to create a survey with various symbols. Utilizing Abdullah and Hubner's (2006) semiotic design analysis of icons and pictograms, fourteen popular brand name symbols were chosen to be first analyzed and then anonymously named by Millennials. This study found that marketing professionals' strategies are successfully relevant to the Millennial generation, causing a mutual understanding between the signifier and the signified, or more specifically, the message marketing professionals are conveying through symbolic design and the message Millennials are receiving. The data observations show the parallel between the efficiency of the design and the efficiency of symbols' usage in society. This study asserts that pictographic language is gradually replacing written language in order to be generationally relevant.

Keywords: Millennials, marketing, media, technology, semiology, media semiotics, icons, pictographs, symbols, visual literacy

Symbolism as The Language of Millennials

Linguists and marketing professionals alike have performed numerous studies on the relationship between Millennials and media semiotics. Many questions arise about the visual literacy capability of “digital natives” and, in effect, how to strategically market to a generation more technologically savvy and media-influenced than any others before them. Because of this, marketing strategists are researching Millennials’ behavior affected by present sociolinguistic influences that alters today’s understanding and use of language. Today’s generation is using language in a variety of forms from Memes to Emojis and in technology that relies on pictographic apps to complete communicative tasks. This paper explores how pictographic language is replacing written language for the purpose of millennial relevancy.

Literature Review

As of 2018, the Pew Research Center has defined the term “Millennials” as the group of people ranging in ages 22-37 (Dimock, 2018). Born between 1981 and 1996, Millennials, also known as “Generation Y,” “Digital Natives,” the “N-Gen” (for “net”) or “D-Gen,” (for “digital”) have emerged as a distinct group from previous generations (Prensky, 2001). While there are some similarities between generations and values that extend from familial influences, several factors create the Millennials’ unique characteristics (Pew Research Center, 2018). This raises some curious questions: What, besides age, distinguishes the Millennial generation from Generation X (ages 38-53), Boomers (54-72), and the Silent Generation (73-90)? Is there a sociolinguistic explanation that defines societal group? In the world of semiology and media, is

there relevant information that is more applicable to the Millennials' generation compared to the previous generations?

Instead of exploring all channels associated with this topic, only sociolinguistic research will be specifically discussed. It is interesting to note how, based on their current research, marketing strategists use sociolinguistic knowledge of Millennials. American writer and speaker on education, Marc Prensky, coined the term "Digital Natives," in his article, "On the Horizon" (2001) when he theorized that the changes in technology are reconstructing the wiring of how Millennials think. Serazio (2013) adds to Prensky's claim stating, "they now require rapid interactivity and graphical interface, abhor top-down exposition in favor of inductive discovery, and are equipped to multitask in a nonlinear, networked fashion" (p.603). Another knowledgeable influencer, known for specializing in business strategy, Don Tapscott (2008), argues for a series of behavioral contrasts differentiating baby boomers from Digital Natives, such as freedom, customisation, scrutiny, integrity, collaboration, entertainment, speed, and innovation (p.74). The American multinational technology conglomerate, Cisco (2014), supplies numerous intercultural statistics about Generations X and Y, and the differences between them in behavior. Cisco reports that society has higher expectations for Gen Y as a "high performer" as well as a more efficient multi-tasker, also referred to as a "supertasker" (one who successfully does two or more tasks at the same time). Gen X employers also believe Gen Y employees are more competent than Gen X employees at using mobile devices and apps (Cisco, 2014).

Over the last century, research has grown in the area of semiology. To understand semiology, one must learn what separates language signs from other signs: time over space. In *Media Semiotics*, Bignell (2002) argues that semiology can be used to discuss language-based

media and image-based media. Drawing on the work of Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, Bignell states, “Our perception and understanding of reality is constructed by the word and other signs which we use,” (p.6). Zender (2013) defines the linguistic sign as a “non-representational symbol that is arbitrarily assigned with a wholly learned connection to a referent” (p.69). In other words, it replaces an object and forms interpretation through pre-existing knowledge, theories, and ideas (Björn & Claas, 2013).

Bignell (2002) continues that in order for signs to be meaningful, the idea behind the sign has to exist and be endorsed in the current social context. Signs are thus organized into a system of groups called “codes” and decoded through a diachronic and synchronic lens of language. In terms of media, codes refer to the message marketers want to convey to their targeted audience in association with today’s cultural context. According to Bignell, because language is forever changing, social groups throughout history have established what certain signs mean for that time period. The clothing item, jeans, diachronically represents work clothes and now they are synchronically decoded as having casual style or youthfulness. In combination with social context, Bignell continues that words semantically rely on paradigmatic and syntagmatic ordering to define their structural relationship between other word possibilities, or signifiers, and the signified to determine the selected sign.

Bignell (2001) quotes French linguist and semiotician, Roland Barthes, who agreed that people use signs to describe and interpret the world, as well as what Barthes called “social phenomenon,” uniting signs and their connotations to construct a message. This formed his idea of “myth” - the ability to create thoughts about people, products, places or ideas and order the chosen signs with their connotations to act in a particular social role. This type of association is

commonly seen in media in the form of metaphor and metonymy. This is seen in social media marketing strategies, for example replacing the word “twitter” with an image of a bird or the Nike symbol replacing an image akin to a check mark with the connotation of completing the task as read in the slogan, “Just do it” (Bignell, 2002).

While language is forever changing, so it seems technology is, too. Brumberger (2011) argues that Millennials have enhanced skills in several technological areas, but especially visual literacy. This is seen in their ability to read and interpret images within the realm of visual communication. In a similar article, Emmanuel and Challons-Lipton (2013) conducts a study finding that visually literate college students show understanding of the meanings of images. They argue that it is possible to be visually literate without knowing how to create, as proven in the ability to interpret a painting without the skills required to be a painter. However, this begs the question, “How literate can a person be?” Age, experience and training are all possible factors. Drawing on Bloom’s taxonomy of learning, Emanuel and Challons-Lipton (2013) believe that Bloom’s levels match visual communication: recognizing, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Bloom’s Taxonomy, 2018). They utilize this concept to form the idea that a person is able to read or visualize at either face value or in a complex manner and with symbolic meaning. The deeper one is able to evaluate, the more fluent in symbolic language he or she is (Emanuel and Challons-Lipton, 2013).

In today’s world, society relies on visual literacy more than ever. Lee (1990) believes that a person’s “interaction” between his or her self-concept and the image of the product is what influences the purchase of a product. He claims that what is interpreted between society and the connotation placed on a product is the “symbolic property” (p.386). According to Lee, symbolic

property communicates something about that object and causes a shared meaning to exist between groups of people in society.

An intercultural society communicates and shares information speedily and efficiently through the globalizing ability of technology, allowing marketing strategists to reach Millennials through graphic design within technology. Dobson and Dobson (2017) state that, “Graphic design has power to make what is and has become socially and culturally acceptable in particular societies appear to be so ingrained that it should not be questioned, much less altered” (p.1). The power of signage has positive and negative influence on society depending on the message the signage is trying to convey. He continues that visual language has become necessary in the 20th century due to new technology, and because of its globalized nature, he believes semioticians have a responsibility to create culturally and socially acceptable signage that will influence for the good of society. Thus, icon ethics becomes important when marketing strategists use media semiotics in their icon design. Anything is an abstract symbol until society shapes its meaning (Dobson & Dobson, 2017).

Shaping society’s perception of companies and brands is completed through the numerous pictographic images of their brands, in the forms of icons, symbols, and pictograms. Zender and Mejia (2013) describe the semiotics of an icon. To clarify, a symbol is, “an image referring to something else -- a referent,”; an icon can be defined as, “a representational image requiring no special learning for a categorical referent” (p.96); and a pictogram as, “a combination of symbols and/or icons and/or glyphs to communicate a narrative or story or data set” (p. 69).

According to Zender and Mejia (2013), icons are composed of a combination of symbols despite their simple and clear appearance. The visual design of an icon relies on certain rules to successfully conceptualize an idea. Zender and Mejia offer a rule of thumb for icon design: “Match symbol to definition...Add symbol to definition...Create symbol hierarchy” (p. 85-86). Generally speaking, an icon requires the right number of symbols needed from a semantic range to determine the overall meaning of the icon. Because icons have multiple symbols, the quantity and quality of the symbols relative to the referent definition cause a person’s comprehension of it to either succeed or fail. Similar to the linguistics of written text, an incomplete definition poorly communicates a concept. To demonstrate this concept, Zender and Mejia (2013) use their example of “Medical Library” icon from their research. They find that fewer symbols hinder the accuracy of the icon comprehension; a bookshelf and desk symbols are closer to “library” for the Medical Library icon than solely a “man reading” symbol. This symbol adds context for the “bookshelf” symbol but was not the key “definition” for the success of the icon (Zender & Mejia, 2013, p.80).

However, unless context is identified and taken into consideration, the connotations of the symbols will be unclear and cause misunderstanding in the decoding process. The proximate context is the environment in which the recognizable images function, or the “field of interaction where symbols in a system interact with other symbols in the same system to construct meaning” (Zender & Mejia, p. 71). People subconsciously associate images with ideas and places, or abstract and concrete thoughts about the world around them (Zender and Mejia, 2013).

The purpose of “symbol hierarchy” is to analyze which symbols are primary and secondary in the decoding process of visual literacy in order to accurately interpret the meaning.

Depending on the complexity of an icon, its referent will need a sequence of concepts for its definition. Like grammatical syntax, the order of thoughts changes the semantics and pragmatics of a definition (Zender, 2013).

Regardless of an icon's precision, icons are frequently misunderstood in intercultural contexts. In their study, "(mis)understanding: icon comprehension in different cultural contexts," Zender and Cassedy (2014) compare the comprehension of 54 universal medical icons in rural Tanzania and the United States. They discover that most of the icons are misunderstood due to cultural differences and lack of medical knowledge. They argue that the success of a cross-cultural icon relies on an "...icon's power to communicate across language and culture ... through simplified resemblance that transcends language so long as the object is known" (p.72). Comprehending an object becomes more demanding as the globalized community relies on icons to understand Olympic venues, navigates through international airports, and download universal and multilingual apps on smartphones. More than any other generation, Millennials use and interpret these platforms in a second nature fashion, making the Millennials a prime target to marketing strategists who want to meet a consumer in his or her natural habitat. Other generations are adapting to a tech-savvy cultural and learning how to interpret visual communication at a slower speed. Zender and Cassedy's (2014) study notes this discrepancy, claiming that it is partly due to an unfamiliarity with technologies across the globe. Despite the age and experience factors, it is also argued that using metaphors sociolinguistically hinders a person's ability to understand what is suppose to be a universal meaning.

The use of metaphors becomes an area of debate within the realm of "emojis." If icons and pictograms are inclined to have universal meaning, how do emojis contribute to the

intercultural community? In 2010, the companies Apple and Google standardized their symbols using “unicode consortium.” Unicode is “a nonprofit corporation that develops standards for internationalization including defining the behavior and relationships between Unicode characters” (Unicode, 2018). Unicode (2018) describes emojis as, “pictographs (pictorial symbols) that typically present in a colorful form and use inline in text. They represent faces, weather, vehicles and buildings, food and drink, animals and plants, or icons that represent emotions, feelings, or activities” (para. 1).

Alshenqeti (2016) argues that today’s society is returning to an earlier stage of human communication similar to hieroglyphics or cuneiform, and because of a technology dependent society, is evolving in order to adapt to today’s technological needs in asynchronous communication. Within technology, emojis are able to fill a gap in nonverbal communication that was not previously possible; they produce a form of pragmatic language that extends to “euphemisms, sarcasm, hints and affection” (p.58-59) -- all modes that suggest a person’s physical and emotional presence. The ultimate purpose of emojis is to enhance written communication in digital messages through a more visual and therefore intimate aspect of language.

Because of the friendly, informal presentation of the emoji, marketing strategists appeal to the Millennial and younger generations in ads, TV shows and movies, and clothing brand names. They include these pictographs across social media sites such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook in order to make them easily recognizable among other campaigns vying for customers’ attention (Wade, 2017). Traffic Generation Cafe (2018) reports scientific studies that claim that 90% of all information received in the brain is visual and takes 0.25% time to process

it. MIT neuroscientists assert that it takes approximately 13 milliseconds to process all forms of an image. Thus, emojis' emotional displays become a quick and viable marketing strategy as they relate to a person's own emotional connection to an idea, person, or object (Traffic Generation Cafe, 2018).

Consequently, the following research is comprised of linguistic, marketing, advertising, sociological, visual literacy, graphic design, media, technological, and semiological information. The particular combination of linguistics, marketing and semiology has been probed from various perspectives to design a knowledgeable vantage point for the study. There is a substantial amount of work to be accomplished in order to further understand society's new forms of visual communication. This study will protract the present information of semiotics and marketing into the realm of symbolic brand names and Millennials' accurate comprehension of them. The following information should combine with linguistic data to authenticate the purpose of marketing strategists in reaching the Millennial generation.

Methodology

In order to consider the relationship between symbolism and brand names presented for Millennial identification, Two research methods were employed: a semiotic analysis of twenty popular brand names and a survey of individuals' comprehension regarding brand names.

To procure this information, I found icon design resources and researched the many types of symbols and their history, how they were designed and why they were chosen. Analyzing the research, I selected symbols that highlighted common graphic and semiotic design techniques that aimed to attract the Millennial generation. I hypothesized that there would be a commonality between design rationale and Millennials' reasoning for preferring graphics over text.

Regarding the design rationale, common themes were found amongst the symbols, including: simplicity, color (shades of color and color association with mood and feelings), modern look, uniqueness, personality, contextual, geographical or historical identity, wordplay, efficiency, and movement or speed implications. These provided diverse data information that I compared and juxtaposed to my findings about Millennials' characteristics.

To narrow the study, twenty Millennial aged college students from Cedarville University's campus were surveyed, ten of which were female and the other ten, males. The students represented a mixture of college levels and from a wide range of majors to strengthen the data: Theological Studies, International Studies, Linguistics, Business, Education, Engineering, IT, Broadcasting, Social Work, and Studio Art.

The qualitative procedure involved a mixture of social media, technology, sport, clothing, stores and food and drink brands notably known for their symbolic images. The rationale behind each category depended on a commonly discussed topic, social place, or product bought among the Millennial generation. Fourteen symbols were selected from six categories: Social media (Pinterest, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat), Technology (Apple), Food (Taco Bell, McDonalds, Chick-fil-a, and Pringles), Drinks (Dunkin Donuts and Starbucks), Sports (Nike and Under Armour) and an online store (Amazon).

From the examination of the literature findings and characteristics of Millennials, two questions were asked on the bottom of the survey, with two goals in mind. First, I wanted the students' opinions and feelings toward text and graphics in order to compare them with the literature findings. Secondly, I inferred that their opinions toward symbols would match the goals of marketing strategists and produce similar words, phrasing and ideas in the responses.

These responses were cross-referenced with the design rationale as seen in Figure 1. Ultimately, responses were analyzed for the purpose of observing if the data coincided with the brand's ability to be relevant to Millennials.

Utilizing Abdullah and Hubner's (2006) semiotic and syntactic rules of pictographic language, I analyzed the fourteen symbols on the survey. Based on my own analysis, I organized them into three main categories: icons, symbols, and indexical signage. Abdullah and Hubner (2006) provide a guide to information graphics that I used to determine the survey symbols' identities. Their syntactic repertoire of formal modes provided the strategy necessary to organize the design components: form, brightness, and color. Each examines the areas of quality, quantity, dimensions, and demarcation. Thus, the sign's relation to its form is established.

Next, adhering to the definition of a pictogram, I cross-examined the four tasks and four aims within the definition. A pictogram definition is, "an image created by people for the purpose of quick and clear communication without language or words, in order to draw attention to something" (Abdullah and Hubner, 2006, p. 23).

Findings and Discussion

The first aim was to create a pictogram that would be universally acknowledged. Because pictograms are man-made, the receiver cannot rely on acquisition but on his or her prior understanding of language. This is seen in Twitter's, Instagram's, Dunkin' Donuts', Pinterest's and Chick-fil-A's icons. They all require a basic understanding of what certain images represent. Twitter's icon is one example of this: it relies on a person's understanding of the word *twitter*, "to utter successive chirping noises; to talk in a chattering fashion" (Merriam-Webster, 2018); it also relies on the understanding of the onomatopoeia *tweet* as the action done on the social media

site. However, to understand the definition of these words, there has to be a general consensus that birds are “chatty” because of the social connotation that context gives in relation to when their tweeting occurs. With the affirmative context of the bird image, these concepts create the overall message that it is a social interaction between people.

The second resultant task and aim (Abdullah and Hubner, 2006) was to have an equally clear, quick and simple visual form to its content. In other words, the syntax and semantics of the pictogram should be equally strong. Twitter’s bird, Instagram’s old-fashioned camera, Dunkin’ Donuts’ coffee drink, Pinterest’s pin, and Chick-fil-A’s chicken are all relevant, simple images that are self-explanatory messages.

The third resultant task and aim (Abdullah and Hubner, 2006) was to be, “...understood independently of writing, words, culture and language” and “a transposition... with easily associates symbols that are culturally neutral and as natural as possible or universally known from common history” (p.23). None of the fourteen symbols in the survey rely on culture to be understood, even though they are culturally relevant to the company’s home culture. The main culturally known associations are related to food companies like McDonald's, Dunkin’ Donuts and Chick-fil-A; however, two of these brands have expanded to become globally known and marketed (McDonald’s and Dunkin’ Donuts). As related to history, only Starbucks and Nike have a historical context directly related from the image to the concept. This alone has not caused their popularity but plays a factor into their symbol design. Starbucks’ design is attributed to three partners in Seattle, Washington who used the name “Starbuck” from the chief mate on the ship in the movie, *Moby-Dick*. However, “Starbuck” is also an island in Greek mythology where sirens lured sailors. Thus, the company created this semiotic concept of luring coffee

lovers into its coffee shop (Kel, 2018). The logo itself becomes a symbol instead of an icon, because it does not directly relate to the coffee shop idea. However, because of its unique context and mermaid image, the pictogram is distinctly recognizable.

The fourth resultant task and aim of Abdullah and Hubner (2006) was to direct the receiver to one fact related to information, direction, or prohibition. Too many facts in a message confuse the receiver resulting in either a slower processing time or no understanding at all. Fortunately, none of the pictograms in this study have complex messages.

The following symbols from the survey also demonstrate characteristic elements of semiology. The company, Apple, uses the image of a bitten apple to distinguish it from other fruits and establish an acceptable connotation from what society usually assigns a negative connotation. Pragmatically, the purpose behind the design was to create something suggesting a feeling of friendliness and therefore a product for everyone (Janoff, 2016). This is also the intention of McDonald's logo, except it syntactically uses the colors yellow and red to play on one's association with friendliness and the red background of the image matches the color outline of McDonald. The color and the letter are both simple symbols while the image of the clown named McDonald is the icon. The same conclusions can be drawn about Snapchat, Taco Bell, Pringles and Nike; all are considered ideograms that represent a concept, independently relating its sign (as a symbol) to the object or concept to which it is referring (Abdullah and Hubner, 2006).

Lastly, the Amazon symbol (Amazon Logo, 2012) identifies as a logogram: "a written, visual form representing a concept with a linguistic reference that does not include a phonetic aspect" (Abdullah and Hubner, 2006, p.10). The letter "a" is a symbol that stands for the store

concept and the orange arrow underneath originally conceptualized the idea that the store had everything from A to Z (About Rob..., 2018). This message was conceived from its other topogram, the word *amazon* spelled out with the orange, arched arrow, pointing from the A and Z in the word. The word *amazon* also refers to the previously understood idea by society that the amazon is a long river that stretches on forever, conotating the idea that it is a store that has everything one might need. Playing on word and color associations, the black purposefully connotes dominance, supremacy, and elegance while the orange connotes pride and happiness (Amazon Logo, 2012). Thus, the revised simple image is successful because of its other well-known typogram.

Utilizing this knowledge gained from each of the fourteen icons, an anonymous survey was produced to hand out to a diverse group of Millennials. Appendix A shows the format and questions of the survey with the expected answers. Figures 1, 2 and 3 show the data observations and results of the study.

Survey Results

It is important to clarify that the survey results do not create a generalizable study for all Millennials. They do clarify the efficiency and effectiveness of symbolism in society. Figure 1 displays the percentages of the students who agreed, disagreed and were indifferent to the first survey question, “Generally speaking, do you prefer graphics over text?” 75% of the students agree, 10% disagreed, and 15% were indifferent.

Figure 2 shows the data observations that were cross-examined with Marketing strategist goals. I hypothesized that there would be a parallel between the semiotic design of the icons and the Millennials’ responses to the icons. For those that agreed with question one, their reasoning

for preferring graphics over text included many similar ideas to symbol design rationale. Some of the most notable words, phrasing and ideas are as follows: “It’s faster,” “easier,” “efficient,” “minimalistic,” “like an abbreviation,” “emojis communicative of real emotion,” “easier to remember,” and “recognizable.” Those that disagreed shared reasonings such as, “text is more efficient,” “intellectual,” “descriptive,” “more contextualized,” “more personal,” and “easier to interpret.” However, other subjects struggled to choose one over the other and chose to be indifferent. Interestingly, their reasonings were either similar or the same to those that agreed or disagreed: “No preference but pictures are more efficient,” “they’re both necessary at different times,” “symbols are preferable and meaningful in public advertising,” and “typing one’s own emojis is faster than searching the picture bank.” There are three possible reasons for this: 1) characteristics of Millennials still remain true, 2) Marketing strategists still maintain a degree of relevancy to Millennials and 3) Society and culture have relatively shaped thoughts and mindsets to newer forms of language and technology.

Discussion

In figure 3, the graph shows the number of symbols from the survey that the subjects accurately named. I categorized them into three groups, those who agreed, disagreed, or were indifferent, to my first question on the survey, “Generally speaking, do you prefer graphics over text?” I combined the symbol naming and answer to the survey question in order to see if there was a pattern between the two.

Interestingly, there was a pattern. Those who completely agreed and disagreed misidentified one symbol, while those who claimed indifference scored perfectly. The two subjects who misidentified Under Armour attempted to guess another sports brands; the one who

disagreed guessed Adidas and the subject that agreed guessed New Balance. I inferred that both were aware it was a sports brand by the common design sportswear companies use in their designs: hard or concrete shapes, black, white or red colors, and lines arranged in a certain way to signify movement. On the other hand, like the other syntactic modes, it has strong and crisp lines that connote speed, strength and athleticism (The History..., 2017).

However, Under Armour is irregular from its sportswear counterparts because of the lack of context and using something more akin to a logogram for a symbol. The letters U and A in the design briefly overlap one another and give an unclear quality to the image. While they are symmetrical in design they are not angled correctly to form an image of a letter and the demarcation of an open form becomes too simplistic (Abdullah and Hubner, 2006, p.15). Pragmatically, the sign's relation to its receiver is weak; the degree of its interpretation is open-ended and has no unambiguous reference to its referent, causing a weak system that does not successfully link the idea it is attempting to portray to its referent. The intention or purpose of the design is also unclear. Is it suppose to be indicative, imperative, or suggestive? (Abdullah and Hubner, 2006, p.16) The common knowledge of printed letters revolves around topography, which in this case, is not used and therefore leaves out the crucial component of a design: context. According to Abdullah and Hubner (2006), an icon without context cannot have a "concrete, usable message" and "if the surroundings change, the meaning of the pictogram will also change" (p.24). For the pictogram to be successful it needs to be connected to an already established association between sender and receiver. Without the contextual clue of sportswear the image fails to be recognizable. Drawing conclusions from all the data, I surmised that there was a high likelihood that the two subjects did not normally buy products from Under Armour,

but more significantly, answered incorrectly because of the design's lack of context and therefore is what caused the misconnection between sender and receiver.

Limitations

Data set limitations. All studies rely on a range of variables indicative of the thesis they are proving. The data supplied in this study is contingent on a small number of symbols for qualitative research and depends upon the success and popularity among Millennials. Other symbols could give various results.

Semiotic analysis. The analysis cannot provide generalizable conclusions apropos to all Millennials, as this study was strictly catered to Cedarville University students in the Millennial age range. One opportunity to improve this limitation semiotically would be to involve choosing a larger number of icons and spending more time researching which icons might have had more success and why. Having a balanced group of successful and less successful icons may change the ability of Millennials to identify them correctly. Studying how closely the semiotic design and relevancy to a group of people would give more insight into the relationship. Another opportunity to improve this limitation would be to juxtapose Millennials and other generations. Giving both groups the same survey might prove to enhance and clarify how relevant marketing strategists are to Millennials in comparison to other generations.

Survey limitations. Several factors influence the survey results. The main problematic influencer was the phrasing of the questions. My intended goal was to extract the feelings and opinions of the subjects without directly asking what their feelings and opinions were. The second problem with the questions was making them either too general or too specific. The generality of the first question caused some need for clarification and some subjects struggled to

answer concretely. A third or different question would have potentially changed the results. Another factor was the number of symbols listed to be identified and the number of them in each category (food, drink, etc.). Giving a more equal number by category would have also potentially changed the results and most likely improved them. A last factor would be to include part two of the survey that more strictly relates to feelings and opinions about symbols. Most subjects wrote their main explanation but had more to write if I had given more open questions. Also, giving more specific questions in regard to the emotional view of symbols would have improved the study.

Conclusion

The corroboration of research, data, and analysis leads to the conclusion that marketing strategists are successful at being relevant to the Millennial generation. This is first proven by past studies and statistics about the Millennial behavior in opposition to past generations and their ability to be multifaceted in a technology-savvy world. Then it is also proven as well by the current small study. Technology has created a new avenue for marketing strategists to target certain groups of people and rely on a system of “codes” to determine the relationship between a sign and the signified that will relay a clear message from the sender to the receiver. These messages use metaphor and metonymy to convey an idea in a particular social role.

In today’s globalized society, people utilize visual literacy at every symbol, ideogram, pictogram and topogram to interact with the information presented and comprehend the intention behind the message. However, the quantity, quality, context, culture and sometimes order of symbols to represent a referent cause miscommunication. To clarify communication, emojis, GIFs, and Memes have been created to adapt a crucial element of language: pragmatics.

Pragmatic language is now available digitally and visually in various modes such as euphemisms, sarcasm, emotion and etc. These forms of visual communication to imitate human facial expressions and feelings make for an easily recognizable image among a throng of other marketing images.

In this study's survey, semiology has been applied to icon design in order to explore how pictographic language has replaced written language for the purpose of Millennial relevancy. As discussed, the Millennials' behavior parallels their feelings and opinions about icons and the results positively correlate between their responses and marketing strategists' goals.

While written language still continues to be used, society has adapted pictographic language and utilizes basic elements of language: syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Language is forever changing and adapting to society's social and cultural needs and will therefore remain indefinitely flexible.

Further Research

Further research in the areas of gender, racial, and generational differences would give insight into how society perceives the world and creates a lens that which society uses to interprets symbolic language. While culture plays a crucial factor in semiotic design it also has more complex aspects that shape society's worldview. Historical occurrences have also developed certain generational worldviews and play a factor into interpretation as well. Lastly, geographical locations and educational experiences alter the interpretation of symbols over time. As language changes, time and history do as well, developing new generational characteristics and worldviews. While more studies can be made, this study contributes to the growing fields of semiotic design, media and marketing in relation to visual literacy and symbolism as a language.

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Appendix A: Survey

Write the company name next to the image.

A.  Apple

B.  Starbucks

C.  Taco Bell

D.  McDonalds

E.  Nike

F.  Pinterest

G.  Twitter

H.  Instagram

I.  Snapchat

J.  Amazon

K.  Dunkin Donuts

L.  Under Armour

M.  Chick-fil-A

N.  Pringles

Generally speaking, do you prefer graphics over text? Yes

Do you feel that one is easier or more efficient to communicate with?

Yes because it's quicker/ convenient/less wordy/ simpler way to communicate.

Figure 1

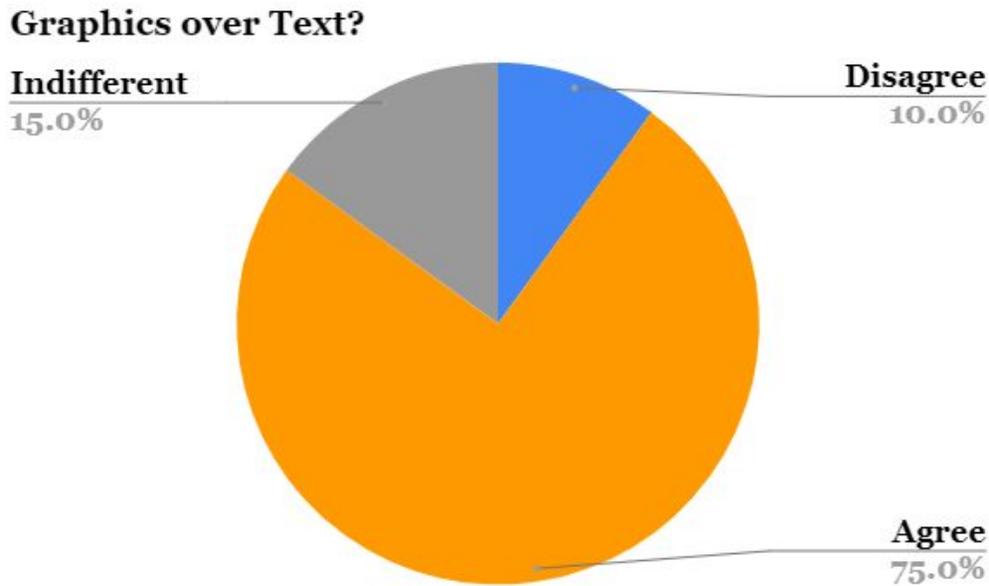


Figure 2

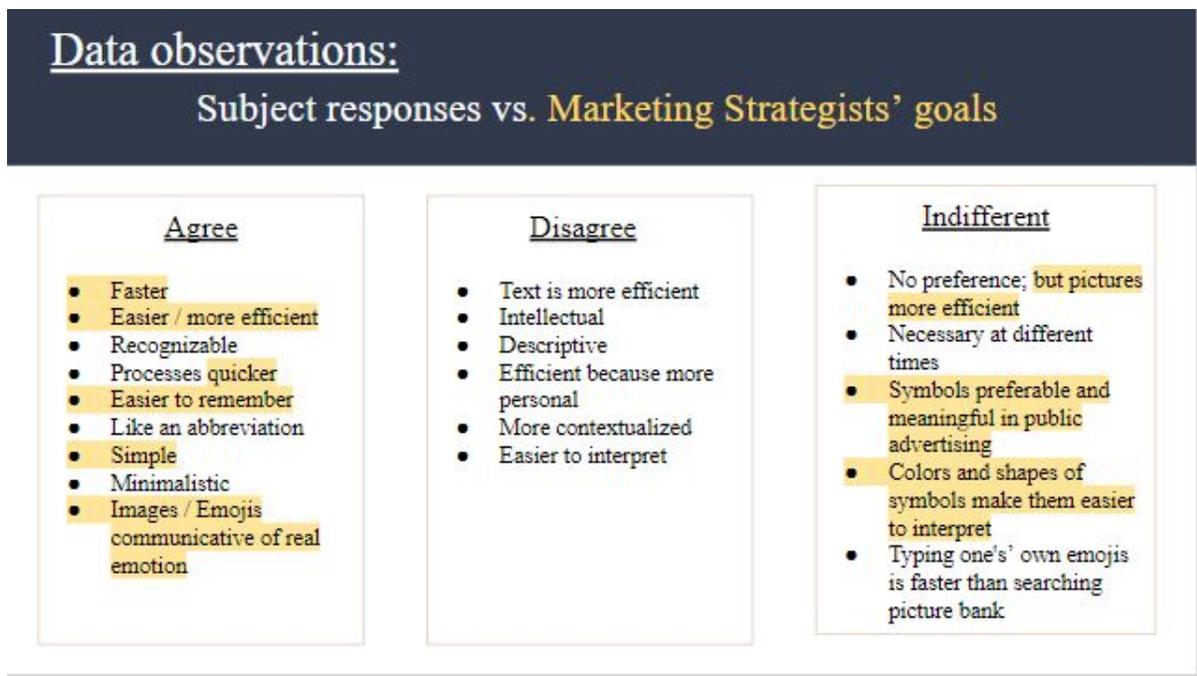


Figure 3

