Visual Identity of Electronic Design Magazines

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Abstract

The changing concept of publication in the light of advanced computer technologies, has transformed into electronic publication where e-media tools are being actively used in the areas of processing, storing and distributing information. Fact to humankind’s needs of reaching information faster & effective, less design & production costs gave rise to importance of e-publications. Electronic magazines stand out among other forms of e-publications and preferred by wide range of readers due to its high visual content and interactivity. So that design features of an e-magazine such as visual identity, using proper multimedia functions, determining the differences from a printed magazine become significance as much as the magazine’s content. This study is focused on graphic and visual design themed e-magazines, their importance and effects on the development of visual design culture in digital world.

Keywords: Electronic publishing, e-magazine, visual identity, graphic design;

1. The Development of Electronic Publishing

A person is in need to learn what is happening around her/him, to announce what happened to her/him, and to transmit his/her ideas to others. She/he has facilitated from various methods for transmitting the information that she/he has. The ideas expressed through signs and symbols at the beginning, have gained a new dimension with writing, reached to masses with the invention of the printing press and could be transmitted to future generations without losing their meaning. Henri Berr, in his introduction of Georges Weill’s Le Journal states “Script and press have played a crucial role in the search for the truth. Script created the talking matter and the press multiplied it endless times and made it eternal. This way, thought overcame time.” (İnuğur, 2002). The technologies that develop in time and the usage of personal computers in desktop publishing starting from the 1980s increased the importance of publishing design. Therefore, this enabled the production of designs with impressive visuals and communicating these designs to the readers. Gradually, publishing ceased to be paper-dependent and is offered to the reader in ways specific to the electronic medium.

Electronic publishing, which emerged as an alternative way to the increasing press and distribution expenses, is a highly preferred type of publishing by the authors and readers. The term e-publishing, defined as the information, which is constituted, stored, processed and updated in computer basis (Kist, 1989), was use to indicate the
broadcasts made or aimed to be replicated through means like fax, radio, and television, to be made ready to be pressed with computer and its complementary tools (printer, scanner, software, etc.). Today this term mostly refers to online or web based publishing. The number of publishing houses and e-publication, what can only be read on the electronic medium, increase every day, and this situation leads to the emergence of a new sector in publishing. E-publications, which could only be read through computers before, can now be read easily thanks to the portable tools like smart mobile phones, e-book readers and tablets while in motion, during holidays, in cars (loud reading system).

Updating the publications in pressed form on the Internet medium, the usage of digital paper and speech recognition technologies in publishing are important cornerstones in the rapid progress of electronic publishing. The electronic publications, which are produced with very low costs today, with their structure that contains all the features of printed press and visual communication tools, have become important tools in mass communication. In this sense electronic magazines, due to comprising all the effects of e-newspapers and web publishing with their visual power and interaction features, have a significant place in e-publication means. The electronic magazines which can be published weekly, monthly or annually are publications which contain articles, research reports, interviews, videos and visuals with contents of politics, sports, literature, arts, technology and design on social, cultural and up-to-date issues, and that can be followed in the electronic medium.

2. Electronic Design Magazines

Most of the e-magazines that are found on the Internet media are designed in the format of web page. However, new technological applications that electronic media supplies, necessitates different modes of understanding and design. In this sense, electronic design magazines, with their interactive structure having multi-media properties, visual power and content play and important role in the development and application of different approaches in e-magazine publishing. The design elements and impacts diverge according to the technique used in the production of the design magazines that have generally 3 different types: PDF, Flash, and HTML.

The electronic design magazines prepared in the HTML have the outlook of a classical web page with their structures having article, review and forum contents. Mostly, on the upper part of the screen the title of the magazine is found, right under it or on the left side of the screen the directing buttons are listed, the flow of the page is from up to bottom. The navigation between the pages is made through the links or buttons on the text or visuals. In these magazines, of which the previous issues or articles can easily be reached, motion pictures or videos prepared as Flash or GIF can be placed from time to time for visual impact. Nevertheless, these elements are limitedly used as the download of motion pictures, sound and video files can take time depending on the Internet speed. Besides the foreign examples of the HTML format design magazines like PingMag and Creative Behaviour, successful examples like Dexigner and Jiklet can also be given from our country.

PDF is one of the mostly used formats of electronic magazine design. Compared to the magazines designed with the other technique its few interactive features, the limited usage of multimedia elements provides advantages in the document size. The PDF magazines having small document sizes are much easier to download, to distribute, to copy and to save. The pages of the magazine can be printed by a printer properly without having visual losses and distortions, can be archived by the readers in printed form. These types of e-magazines can easily be viewed by different operating systems like Acrobat Reader, MacOS and Windows. Page navigation buttons, web links, video, sound and Flash elements added from outside together with the recent editions of Acrobat provide facilities for different designs. Even though it does not have a striking impact in visual sense with its page layout which is not generally very different from a printed design magazine, it is preferred by the readers for its usability and small document size. Foreign magazines such as Moloko+, Blanket, and Beast are the outstanding examples of electronic design magazines published in the PDF format.
Flash is one of the popular formats in electronic design magazines because of being a leading technology with its artistic impact. It provides the designer various facilities in constituting motion pictures as it works basically vectorially and additionally as it supports Bitmap images. Numerous applications like animations, page flipping effect, theme songs that the reader can choose from, changing background images, interactive images, texts that follow the motion of the mouse can be applied to the design with special codes called actionscript. Finally, the finished work can not only be viewed in almost every computer with SWF extension, but also with special saving options can be converted to document formats which can work by itself in the medium that it will be published.

Flash e-magazines, many examples of which can be seen in the world of graphic design, are among the magazine types with the highest level of user interaction. The reader has the options to view the magazine full-screen or in one part of the screen on a chosen background. An image composed of repeating texture is placed in the background, in the middle of the screen in order to enhance the comprehensibility of the magazine. Therefore, the magazine is detached from the desktop image of the computer and the reader is enabled to focus easily to the magazine. This background image constituted by a texture, drawing or a photograph can be offered to the reader’s choice with more than one option. Mostly a thematic medium is also created by the usage of sound that supports the background image. For instance, in Encore Magazine, when “on the beach” theme is chosen among the 4 background options, the background of the magazine is covered with a sand image and the sounds of sea gulls, waves and the voices of children running at the seaside are placed at the background.

Sound, which is an important part of making sense of our environment, is very crucial in expressing the reality of the image in an electronic medium. Sound is a psychologically complementary element of the image size. The viewer generally tends to perceive sound and the image on the screen as a whole (Kılıç, 2003). Sound effects and music that diversified, thanks to the developing technologies, made the e-magazines livelier and enhance the readers’ attention to the magazine. The key sounds used at the buttons in the pages, complement the meaning of the image and perpetuate the feeling of interaction for the readers. The background music found in many Flash magazines creates an emotional virtual world and makes contributions to the time the reader enjoys. “The elements of image and sound are in leading and complementary places varying from time to time. Between these two elements which are in fact perceived separately, there is an absolute unity in design.”(Zettle, 1973).

In the applications in which various elements like sound, image, animating, and video are used simultaneously, “interaction” is crucial. The 2 most important differences of electronic publishing from the printed publishing are its “multimedia” and “interaction” features. Especially in electronic magazines, the passive reader of the traditional means, are enabled to take the authority and gain power. The reader, different from the printed magazines, has the control of the movements in pages and the features. In the interaction realized through the reader’s mouse clicks and keyboard approvals, she/he can open or close the magazine whenever she/he wants, turn the pages, stop the videos and sounds and restart them. The most commonly used interaction method in the electronic magazines, is the application of holding the page from the corners, lifting it them and flipping it just like a page of a real magazine. This striking method is used in the great majority of the Flash magazines. This application, which is thought for psychologically making the reader have the feeling of reviewing a printed publication virtually, is one of the methods of navigating through the pages. Apart from this, navigation is made in the shape of page icons opened face-to-face at the bottom of the page or with forward-backwards buttons. In some magazines like Bigmag the “colour” element is used actively for the organization of the contents. In the Bak example, with a different understanding visual follow-up is facilitated through placing small preview images of the related pages on the stripe at the bottom of the page. Common buttons like forward/backwards, volume/mute, contents, communication, and exit are placed in the spaces left at the top and bottom of the magazine, at the points where the reader can reach any time. The buttons that change their colour when the reader comes to the buttons with the mouse, make their interactive structure felt explicitly.
Page design is the organization of data in a readable, attractive and effective way. A publication introduces itself to the reader and makes itself read not only with its content but also with its page layout. Thus, how the design elements like text, photograph, and visualization are designed and presented within the framework of the features of the publishing medium (paper, screen) has a big importance. The relationship among all these elements, from the chapter title to the page number, from the contents page to the back cover, influences the formation of the visual identity of the magazine. The majority of the electronic magazines are designed by using motionless elements similar to the page designs of the printed magazines in the form of two pages facing each other or of a brimful singular page. However, the pages can be designed effective with many different techniques that the electronic medium provides. In the example of the Root magazine, enabling navigation with camera when different points of the work in the page are clicked or the usage of video rather than a motionless image in the background of the contents page boost the attraction to the magazine.

The typographic choice and the way it is applied is the basic issue of the page design. The most important tool that reveals the difference of a magazine from its competitors is its original typography. Namik Kemal Sarıkavak (Sarıkavak 2004) defines typography as “not only visual, audial and aesthetic organization of the letters and other elements related to literary-visual communication but also a design language formed by these elements.” The influence of typography is very strong firstly at the transmission of knowledge and then in the formation of the identity of the magazine and making it internalized. In addition to this, the search for a togetherness of legible and creative design in which design is not sacrificed for the sake of readability, readability is not sacrificed for the sake of design have always existed. Every magazine should have a typographic design approach from the fonts used in the texts to the organization of the spaces between letters-words-lines, from the alignment style to the form of emphasis.

Since the space that the magazine occupies depending on the magazine’s size, is a surface on which information and visuals are presented, is an important factor in the perception of the content. The size of the magazine when it is closed can be different from the structure revealed when the pages are opened. Size is a structural quality unique for a magazine, which the reader can easily recognize and remember. Unlike the horizontal rectangular shape of the PDF magazines, Flash magazines frequently have a vertical rectangular structure. Even though the majority of the electronic magazines have similar formats, sometimes magazines designed with different formats can be seen. Scrapbook and Humus are the examples of this understanding. These e-magazines that adopt the Moleskin format, which is the notebook used by many European artists and thinkers such as Van Gogh, Picasso, and Hemingway, due to their small sizes, only contain the works or web links of artists/designers, do not contain long texts like articles or interviews.

The cover, which can be defined as the window of the magazine, enables the magazine to be easily recognized and selected. The cover advertises the magazine, works as the packaging and informs the reader about the contents. The cover in the electronic magazines, as in printed magazines, is graphical spaces that contain the leading titles and are designed in a colourful and attractive fashion. Nevertheless, the texture, photograph or drawing used in the background can highlight the cover, as it can reduce its effect as well. For instance as in Newwebpick magazine, the colour weight of the pictures used in the background and the drawing elements having similarities with the cover reduces the visual power of the cover. The cover should be designed striking and comprehensible way because it has an essential responsibility about the magazine’s content and identity.

“The most important criterion in evaluating a magazine is the concept of identity. The publishing philosophy, history, the world view of the publisher or the group of publishers of a serial, make up the identity, in other words the ‘spirit’ of the publication… We call making the character of the publication visible or distinct visual identity. Visual identity enables the serial publication to be recognized and identified among other publications throughout its publication life” (Koz & Çelik, 2001). Visual identity in magazines is an important component that influences the process of being recognized, remembered and preferred. Magazines having a successful visual identity are
publications having consistent design structure and showing endurance. For this purpose, it is important for all the visual elements of the product to be designed in accordance with the aims of the institutional identity. Despite the fact that there are many e-magazines published in the field of design, the number is unfortunately insufficient in our country. E-magazines, which have a significant place in sharing different design approaches among different cultures, are spaces of exhibition with multimedia content where artists and designers can share their articles and works with the whole world (Pektas Turgut, 2009). In this sense, for announcement of the developments and news in the field of design in Turkey, for exhibition of the works, and for the development of art/design education, publishing and increasing the number of e-magazines unique with their design, having a visual identity, and effective in content is very crucial.

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