

**'The blue-green simplicity of online communication':
How companies and consumers use design to convey and construe
visual messages in communication and social smartphone apps**

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Abstract:

The popularity of smartphones has given rise to frequent engagement with communication applications (Ofcom, 2017). More people are searching for and using apps facilitating social functions, changing not only the way we communicate with each other but also how companies communicate with their customers (Nielsen, 2014). Companies utilise visual semiotic cues in product design to communicate figurative messages and evoke emotional responses about their products (e.g. Bloch, 1995; Creusen & Schoormans, 2005). Product design research has focused on physical goods and foodstuffs (Spence, 2012); however, growing app markets require attention to enlighten communicative design in *virtual* environments.

A corpus of 500 apps will investigate the deployment of colour and shape in app design, and how these cues can influence our online communication and operate as persuasive tools. From a subset of 30 communication apps, 100% used geometric forms (i.e. circle, square, triangle, octagon, etc.) in their logo. Simple designs increase the chances for successful product construal by consumers in limited exposure time (Hansen, Pracejus, & Gegenfurtner, 2009). Moreover, deploying simplistic palettes and forms effectively captures consumer attention and portrays apps as easy to use and navigate (Kieras & Hornof, 2014).

Many communication apps have blue or green backgrounds (36.7% and 20% respectively); colours associated with communication, security, trust, and efficiency (Wright, 1988; Mahnke, 1996; Fraser & Banks, 2004; Kaya & Epps, 2004). 66.7% (n=4/6) of instant messaging apps downloaded 0.5-1 billion times are blue or green, which invokes these desirable values through their colour choices. These successful colours connect with the concept of 'online communication' as social apps use similar colour schemes. A web-based experiment with smartphone users will determine their perception, appreciation, and experience of apps. Combining corpus with experiment will illuminate how companies communicate through, and consumers construe, visual cues of virtual social products in online marketplaces.

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