

How Technology Shaped the Power of the Symbol

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Introduction

What is a symbol and semiotics as a whole?

The impact of symbols throughout time.

How the digital world evolved the comprehension of symbols.

How does this affect people in today's society?

What is a Symbol?



To understand what a symbol is, first we must consider what semiotics is as a whole. Ferdinand De Saussure broke down communication into 3 main aspects: Sign, Signifier, and Signified. To paraphrase, a sign refers to the method or medium of which the attempt to communicate a message exists. If a warning appeared on a label, the label would be the sign. A signifier refers to the elements included to invoke a thought. This is what is considered a symbol. The “warning” on that warning label is the signifier. Finally, The signified refers to what result manifests in the viewer’s mind after digesting the signifier. A person reading that warning label now understands to be warned; this is the signified.

How Symbols Were Used.

Symbols have always been around and impactful in civilization. Throughout history, symbols were normally physical indicators rooted in cultural, historical, and societal functions. Symbols helped recognize religious beliefs and values, trade and navigation, written communication, social status, etc.

Cultural Symbols

Symbols like the Cross, Star and Crescent Moon, various jewels, colors, fabrics, and even animals indicated the presence, sacredness, and influence of various cultures around the world.



Navigation Symbols

Symbols like the stop signs, beware signs, and compasses all guide travellers to their destinations.



Status Symbols

Symbols like Crowns, robes, and emblems display hierarchy and power.

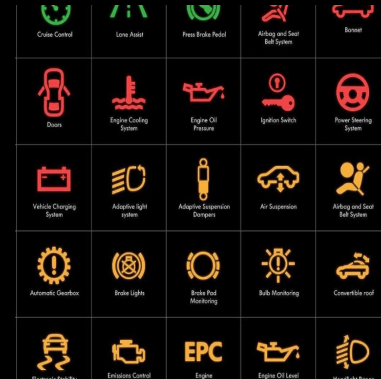
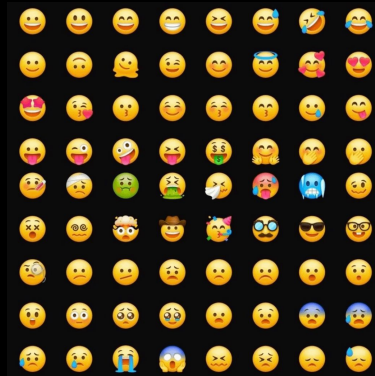
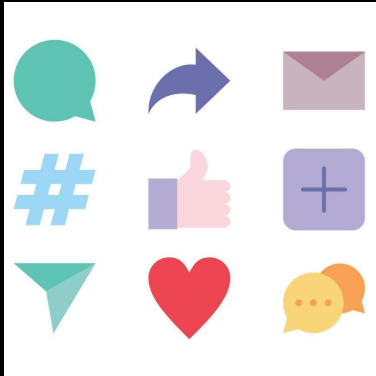


The Digital World's Influence

To no surprise, symbols today are still generally use in this same fashion. However, the digital world added onto the limitations that these symbols possess. Up until the digital world, symbols and signs were often regional or contextual. People outside of India wouldn't know that the "Bindi" on the forehead signifies "third eye" or the connection to one's inner self. A non-english speaker may not know what a stop sign is telling them. Another limitation was reinforcing the practice and familiarities of symbols.

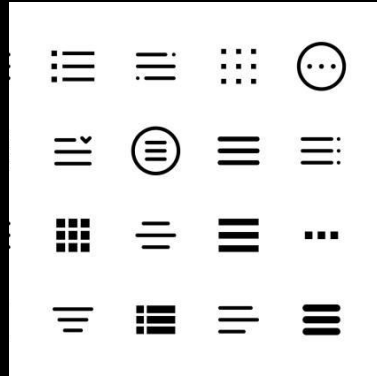
The Digital World's Influence

Today's symbols have become ubiquitous worldwide. They are dynamic and convey complex and more abstract ideas almost instantly. Symbols have become more visual, allowing flexibility of understanding from multiple people. Symbols like Emojis, icons, logos add context to communication, that transcend language barriers.



The Effects on Today's Society.

However, the biggest asset the digital world provided is how frequently people interact with symbols. The casual interactions of symbols propelled the comprehension of symbols especially to the generation of people who grew up during the popularity of technology.



Conclusion

We as a society are growing into a more visual world. We are gradually creating a world where communicating, especially world wide with other cultures, is more simple and effective. We may one day create a language that relies only on illustrations... oh wait, we did already.



Thank You!
