

# The Design Concept Reflects the Work to Awaken Social Responsibility

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## ABSTRACT

The paper mainly focuses on four subcategories of design for social issues which aims at dealing with specific social issues and how to improve the situations. Before these are analyzed, it will first discuss three elements of design for social issues and what contributes to the whole system to make it run coordinately. The four aspects are separately making good use of sympathy, corporate social responsibility, reduce the sense of alienation, and arouse awareness of less waste. Each of the subcategories would be discussed with typical examples accordingly. Among these points, it would emphasis on the first and the second one to develop in detail.

**Keywords:** *Corporate social responsibility, Social design, Product design, Industrial design.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The unbalance distribution of resource in global scale has created a series of social issues. As various professional fields contributed to address the situation, the area of design, specifically socially responsible design, has also played a significant part in this process and inspired many participators.

## 2. THREE ELEMENTS: PARTICIPATORS, TARGETS AND AIMS

Socially responsible design generally commences with opting an obvious social issue which can vary from a problem of a community to an affair of a nation or a region. As part of the society, individuals, organizations and companies are involved in the design implementing process to fulfill the vision where the society develop towards the positive orientation as designers prospect. People whom the social issues mainly have impact on would directly or indirectly benefit from those design projects. However, the aims of socially responsible design are not only at addressing

problems and helping people in need, but to some degree, obtaining social credibility for the companies themselves so that they can make their projects sustainable to guide every sector run in a virtuous circle. As for individuals, they are one sector in the design projects as the accumulation of their actions would eventually bring actual benefits. Meanwhile, the design projects also stimulate individuals to consume, which assure the profits of companies and the sustainability of the projects, and these are also the factors that designers should take into account to allow the design collaborate with various groups and individuals well (Pink, S, Duque Hurtado, M, Sumartojo, S., Vaughan, L.2020. 243).

## 3. MAKING USE OF THE SYMPATHY OF CONSUMERS TO HELP PEOPLE LIVING MAKING A TOUGH LIVING

No matter in the developing or developed areas, the unbalanced distribution of resource for people always causes numbers of social issues. According to incomplete statistics, the impoverished population in the world was approximately 736 million in 2015, and half of the people are centralized in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia

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(The World Bank 2016). As the United Nations has the will of eliminating poverty, organizations, companies and individuals would more or less take this responsibility.



Figure 1 Grand Prix.

A worldwide advertisement company BBDO once designed a vending machine which offer multiple choices for consumers in Berlin, Germany. This project is called The 2 Euro T-Shirt-A Social Experiment by Fashion Revolution, which means when a consumer put two Euros in the machine, the screen will present a short video demonstrating the exploited labors working for the fast fashion industry to produce T-shirts being sold in the machine. (See "Figure 1") Most of the labors are impoverished women and children who make a tough living working more than sixteen hours per day in a crowd and enclosed environment with extremely low salary. After that, the consumer is offered with two options whether take a T-shirt or donate the two Euros to the labors. The result is that over ninety percent of consumers would choose to donate. Such a successful design informs us that via directly heart hitting shots designers can easily stir the sympathy of consumers and prompt them to have a knowledge of the ethical issues about the daily commodity from the industry production and become a group of members to permit the socially responsible design to actually behave on altering the unjust society. In this design practice, the designer's action greatly reflected on the following topic of understanding the role in the social change and act as a design activist rather than mere "servant problem solvers" or "service providers" (Rezaia\* and Khzaeib 2017, 3516).

#### **4. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

In recent years, researchers and professionals have increasingly emphasized the importance of

social responsibility in companies and commercial offices. Supply chain plays an important role in today's business environment, so we must take social responsibility seriously when designing and planning a sustainable supply chain (Pishvae, M.S; Razmi, J; Torabi, S.A 2012, 1). The implementation of some socially responsible design projects requires the support of companies. In return, these are also opportunities for companies, especially the large-scale ones, to burden the responsibility for social issues. Although at the international level, it is a compulsory strategy and seen as a mode of self-discipline of the companies, many companies regard it as a juncture of improving brand reputation (Zachary 2019, 565).

#### **4.1 IDEO**

For most companies, innovation is the inner driving force and the nuclear policy of the development plan (Owen, Richard; Bessant, John; Heintz, Maggy 2013). The successful design of marketing mode which allows the company to take corporate social responsibility as well as making profit has no doubt to be a proficient method of social reacting and expecting innovation. A well-known example is IDEO, a global design and innovation company. It once investigate the situation of fresh drinking water in some less developed areas like India and Africa. Initially, designers of IDEO mainly focus on enhancing the appearance of products and provide innovative product design and industrial design. However, in the project of addressing the problem of acquiring cheap and easy-to-use water, designers undertook the process of designing tools to handle real problems. For areas like India where people need to take a long distance to fetch fresh water, IDEO designed a water intake device to make it convenient for the local people to draw water. Apart from that, IDEO also keens on improving the life quality of people in poor districts of other aspects. For instance, the productions of free mosquito nets to reduce malaria and providing nutritious food for malnourished children in Vietnam and other places. Tim Brown and Jocelyn Wyatt (2010, 31) mention the concept of "Design Thinking for Social Innovation", which means solving social problems through innovative design methods to better provide vulnerable groups with affordable solutions. With socially responsible designer taking addressing social problems as their duty, their abilities of creation and innovation are devoted to the efforts for the social improvements and developments.

## 4.2 Toms

Similar with IDEO, as a for-profit company whose market business covers shoes as well as eyewear, coffee, apparel and handbags, Toms developed a social design project aim at supporting aboriginal people in impoverished areas. It started with a campaign of "Buy one for one" to get every consumer involved in doing good things for the sake of improving the social through the designed mechanism. Initially, every deal with a pair of shoes would commit another pair to be donated for poor children in Argentina. Then the eyewear sale mode followed. When a pair of glasses is sold an opportunity for a person in those poor districts to thoroughly cure any eye disease is provided by Toms Company. However, Toms' cross-border marketing does not stop here. They sell coffee to donate fresh drinking water for people in the coffee beans origins at the same time. To be specific, a deal with a bag of coffee beans donates 140 liters fresh water while a deal with a cup of coffee donates drinking water for a day. Toms' socially responsible design mode is proved to be successful. Not only because this project makes it clear for consumers to know which specific and transparency donation items they contribute to, but also it assures the sustainability of both the social project and the profits together with the reputation of the company. Gavin Melles, Ian de Vere and Vanja Misic (2011, 143) emphasized the significance of sustainability of socially responsive product design in their article. To some degree, Toms' mode is a prominent instance to have it practiced and reaps good social benefits.

## 5. REDUCING THE SENSE OF ALIENATION AMONG PEOPLE ASIDE AND BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

Social design from companies cannot always cover extremely large issues, sometimes their design focus more on relatively small scales and circumstances that are not so serious. Nowadays, the highly developed Internet gradually makes us spend more time chatting with people from all over the world on social networking sites, but less conversations with relatives around us. If distance is no longer a problem, how to return to the people aside is what modern people really need to consider. A German company named Scholz & Volkmeritle has established the Kiezkaufhaus community logistics platform project intending to switch this situation. Scholz & Volkmer's approach

is to provide residents with a reasonable and diverse variety of goods for local consumers to purchase commodities needed for daily life through this platform, reducing their time to go out of home not accompanying their families. As for the courier, the platform hires the local elders to deliver, making it rational for them to join the daily community instead of staying at home from Monday to Friday. Such is how design trust is implemented among the community (Warwick 2017, 3096). Each kind of participators in this design practice developed trust for the project, and this trust is essential for the following development of the society according to Warwick.

## 6. AROUSING THE AWARENESS OF PEOPLE OF LESS WASTE

The duty to carry socially responsible design does not have to be undertaken by a company sometimes. Actually, individual designer can also react to some social issues. The unbalanced distribution of resources mentioned above not just reflects in the hard living condition in underdeveloped areas, and on the waste from the abundant groups.



Figure 2 Tina Austen.

A Danish designer named Tina Austen designed a series of works called "'On Your Plate' — Ceramic Taste to Each His Own". (See "Figure 2") She used experimental materials and techniques to create bright colors and strong texture designs. This work series comments on food and resource waste issues. The different colors, structures and formats reflect decay and waste, show their criticism of this social problem and encourage people to reflect on the situation we confront with every day.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This paper firstly puts forward three pivotal elements of socially responsible design: participators, targets and aims. Then the essay

discusses on four essential subcategories in detail, which are also four approaches that design can contribute to improve the society and address the typical social issues. The discussion in the main body emphasized on the innovative efforts corporations launch for the whole community to get individuals involved. All of the examples are successful design practices and follow the principles of socially responsible design well. These successes also owe to the designers who help to bind the groups and individuals. At last, the essay nominates the design work of individual designer who can response to social problems as well.

### **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

This paper is completed by Wen Zhang and Xinghong Liu. Wen Zhang is responsible for the writing and correcting, and Xinghong Liu has contributed to the edit and submission of this paper.

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