

Snapping (identities) through design forward

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1 Abstract

«Social norms are powerful. People will mostly do what they see others do. It's how the human animal learns to succeed. What we learn from the curricula of conventional education pales in comparison to what we learn by watching the actual behavior of the teachers and students around us.» (Mau, 2020).

This reflection, in relation to design as a discipline capable of enacting transformative processes in society - defining it through the formalization of roles and possibilities, as well as to stereotypes and forms of oppression - offers an inspiring perspective of the subject matter. In fact, Design is a leading discipline in the definition of society, shaping roles and possibilities, as well as stereotypes and forms of oppression. The concept of social norm can be analyzed from different perspectives, such as gender and identity, culture, ethnicity and many other aspects that contribute to the definition of identities (Lorber, 2021). These invariably result in stereotypes and prejudices, based on socially accepted social patterns rooted in a past that is too far from the contemporary cultural model. An ever-evolving model, projected into a fluid future. As Bruce Mau states, to design new standards, it is mandatory to create an environment that aims for change. It becomes necessary for designers to adopt a new mental approach by going for a social, creative and ecologically sustainable model. Today, these archaic norms do not reflect the fluidity of the social context where designers, future designers and users are evolving, becoming vehicles for the evolution in which they are immersed. «Design is responding to an age of intense economic, political and ecological instability with resourcefulness and creativity. Public interest is soaring as a new generation of designers is using advanced technologies to pursue their political and environmental objectives in increasingly ambitious projects, as well as to reinvent the objects and spaces we use every day» (Rawsthorn, 2018).

To pursue this goal, Paul Dolan proposed a tool called SNAP - which stands for Saliency, Norms, Affects, Primes - to understand how people make their decisions: this tool was developed with the aim of simplifying and streamlining the management of complex projects.

This approach, derived from neuroscience, opens up valuable multidisciplinary scenarios for the design profession. The SNAP Matrix is a conceptual model and implementing this methodology can



help to achieve objectives in a more efficient and sustainable manner, facilitating easier management of the complexities of change and actively involving the key people involved in the project. The SNAP tool applied to gender studies and the design discipline opens up a parallel reflection.

Indeed: Salience refers to whatever grabs our attention. It's a prerequisite of behavior change; NORMS refers to the power of social norms in driving behavior. Specifically, the term "Norms", understood as normality - otherwise called standards - defines roles, social order, power hierarchies, oppressions; AFFECTS are emotions, and decisions are mostly emotion-driven. Designers' engagement must be emotional, not only factual; PRIMES are surroundings that push behavior in a certain direction. For a design capable of making a tangible change in society, using this tool gives an insight into the impact that design has on users.

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