





Mapping The Landscape of Sustainability Challenges

The case of selected graphic design firms in Ghana



G. Assibey Bonsu, AV. Chisin & RD Debrah

Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), South Africa, Cape Town





BACKGROUND

The practice of sustainability has become fragmented. Thus, there are still a huge number of enterprises, which have challenging practicing it.

Among such professions is graphic design, which is still lagging behind in terms of innovations in sustainability. Also sustainability has been largely product-based within the design disciplines with a focus on solutions generated towards sustainable product design.

Fry, 2009, Mitchell, 2012, Wright,2010



BACKGROUND – CONT’N.

The challenges inherent in the fragmentation were therefore worthy of investigation for better understanding of the situation from a graphic design perspective to enlighten the industry players on how to tackle the challenges contextually.



THE LANDSCAPE OF GRAPHIC DESIGN- A VIEW FROM SUSTAINABILITY PERSPECTIVE

Though graphic design has contributed immensely to economic growth it has been criticised for its engagement in gross product consumption and misconceptions for economic development at the expense of the environment and the society.

Reese, 2014:4, Sargent, 2013:78



Background – Cont'n.

Though graphic designers have adopted “green” approach to sustainability, it is seen as unsustainable because it leads to “rebound” effects as a result of:

- Overconsumptions of green products
- Green washing
- Businesses exploiting green as a marketing strategy





What is the way forward in sustainability in the graphic design space?

BACKGROUND – CONT’N.

There should be a paradigm shift from an ecological perspective to a human-centred perspective.

Sustainable challenges are caused by humans and thus the ideal approach to tackle it should be human-centred.

However, before these suggestions are implemented, one needs to probe into the current challenges faced by the graphic design industry in order to develop informed sustainability strategies to move sustainability discourse from theory to practice.



BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH AREA: ASAFO, KUMASI - GHANA

- This research was conducted at Asafo, a suburb of Kumasi in Ghana.
- It is an area that has a cluster of about 30 graphic design and printing shops, though it is a residential area.
- The key products they produce are books, posters, labels, packages, magazines, brochures and newspapers.

RESEARCH METHOD



- This research employed a qualitative approach.
- Target population: Graphic design and printing shops at Asafo in Kumasi which was selected based on convenience sampling.
- Five firms were selected out of about 30 graphic design and printing firms based on 5 years working existence of the graphic design firms.
- Out of the five (5) firms, 10 graphic designers, 10 printing machines operators and 10 finishing workers were selected for the study. The research instruments used for the data gathering were interview guides and observation.

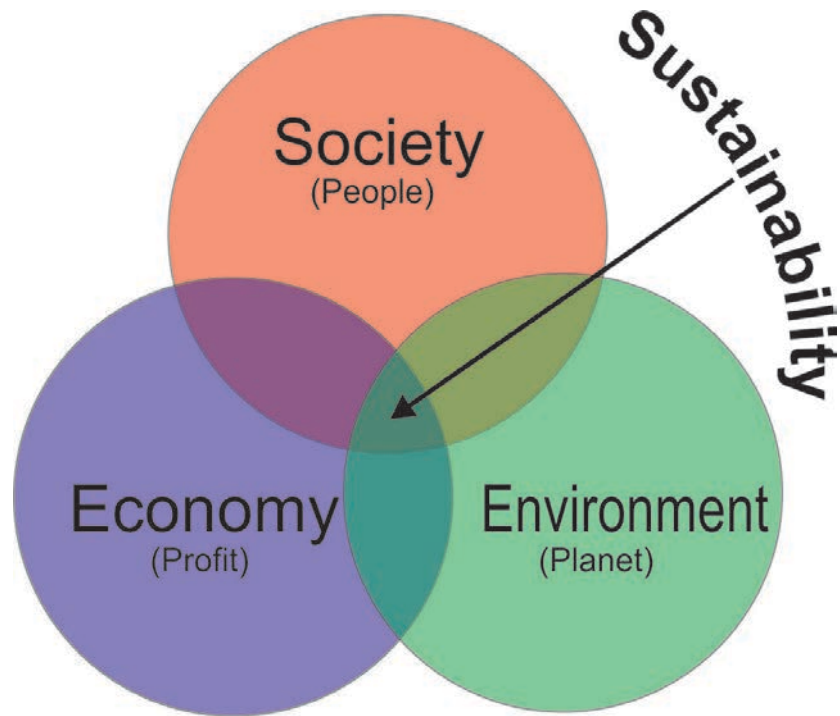


Figure 1: Interlocking circles of sustainability

Theoretical framework

Theory of Sustainability

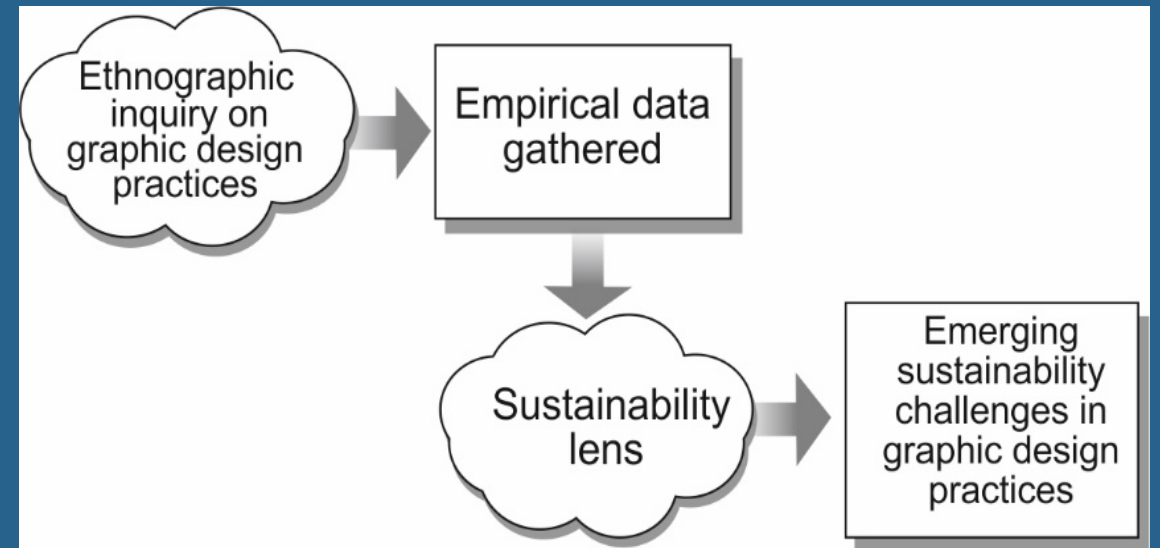


Figure 2: The interplay of sustainability lens in the research



FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results from the research were categorised based on the departments in the graphic design and print shops. The departments : the pre-press, press and post-press.

The challenges in the pre-press were:

1. Questionable aesthetics that leads to overuse of materials. Eg. Extreme white spaces leading to overuse of paper.
2. Miscommunication causing rejection of designed and printed materials.
3. Technical errors such as colour change caused by design applications and typographical errors also lead to waste of materials.
4. Clients inability to specify their design needs.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION – CONT’N.

The challenges in the press and post-press were:

1. Printing machines were outmoded and thus the whole printing process overuse materials. Eg. Ink wastage and paper overuse.
2. Lack of skills by the printing machine operators also leads to overuse of resources.
3. Chemicals used for the printing were directly discharged into drainage systems which also have effects on the ecological systems.
4. Knowledge sharing by the printers was hampered by fear of competition.
5. Excess of confidentially printed documents were burnt.
6. Trimmed laminated cards regarded as waste were treated as non-recyclable due to the lamination.



CONCLUSION

- Looking critically at the findings, the challenges were more related to resource ***over usage driven by technical issues***, lack of knowledge and clients' miscommunication as well as extreme weather conditions which makes printing on paper very difficult.



CONCLUSION

- Most of the design products do not facilitate overconsumption of materials because the designers mainly produce books.
- The concept of human-centred approach to sustainability can not be applied to all design issues because the type of work done by the designers and the context in which they are done shape the determinant factor for providing sustainable and adjustable solutions.





THANK YOU

CONTACT

ginnbonsu@gmail.com

chisina@cput.ac.za

rddebrah.art@knust.edu.gh