

How can communication design add value in the context of Alzheimer's disease?

Keywords: communication design, Alzheimer's disease

This paper describes a practice-based study that investigated different ways in which communication design can be applied in the context of Alzheimer's disease, a disease that is affecting millions worldwide (Prince & Jackson, 2009). In an iterative process between practice and research, visual outcomes were created specifically aimed to raise awareness and understanding of the disease and to facilitate interaction between people with Alzheimer's disease and their carers and families. Using first-hand experience with people with Alzheimer's disease, the study used generative research through observational methods and participatory activities, which were constantly redesigned to fit the practice and the needs of the users. The paper describes this process and the produced outcomes, which are divided in three groups: information visualisations about dementia (fig.1); reflection and discussion through graphic interpretations of symptoms, thus creating empathy for a deeper understanding of the disease (fig.2); and support tools to promote interaction between people with Alzheimer's disease and their families, with attention to layout and typographic details (fig. 3, 4, 5).



Figure 1: Map of dementia causes and symptoms.

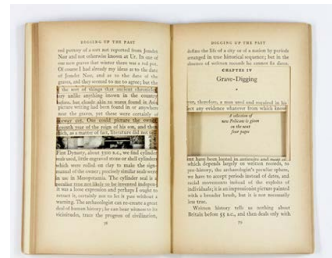


Figure 2: Digging up the Past. The book was modified to reflect on how memory is affected by Alzheimer's disease



Figure 4: Tablecloth with silhouettes of crockery and cutlery to enable laying the table. User-testing with first iteration of the product



Figure 3: Memory Card Game. Personalised set of visual and written cues to trigger memories in a playful way, allowing different ways and levels of interaction

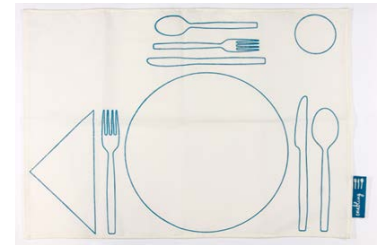


Figure 5: Laying the Table mats. Final outcome

Drawing on design approaches for dementia in other fields such as product, interior and service design (Design Council, 2012; Pullin, 2009; Tan & Szebeko, 2009; Timlin & Rysenbry, 2010), this paper discusses the value of communication design for Alzheimer's disease and the considerations to be taken into account when designing in this context. To conclude, this study is a starting point for further investigation in this field, extending the understanding of the disease, providing practical tools for the Alzheimer's sufferer support and suggesting possible graphic design guidelines for communicating directly with people with Alzheimer's disease.

References

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