Veggie Friends

Viewpoints for Socially Minded Sticker Designers

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Master's Thesis
Aalto University
– School of Arts, Design & Architecture
Department of Media
Graphic Design
NO!
HELLO!
BYE
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1. Introduction

This Master’s Thesis looks into the phenomenon of chat stickers in Instant Messaging environments as a form of visual communication. The thesis consists of a written part and an artistic production. The study combines together broad themes: food, communication and influencing people’s behaviors. I approach the subject through literature review, analysing existing stickers, and through my own artistic work, the design process of the sticker brand, Veggie Friends.

In the written part I open up the landscape of contemporary Computer-Mediated-Communication (CMC). In more particular, I will be looking at graphic emoticons, such as Emoji characters and chat stickers. What are they used for? Why are these little icons and pictures so popular? and what is all this sticker business about? Visual culture plays a vital role in the society carrying meanings and affecting people’s opinions, also food choices. As people spend more and more time in front of screens, it might be that the images we see in digital environments have an effect on our eating habits too. I am interested to know what kind of codes we can see in current sticker packs and how meaning making takes place in this context. Maybe here lays a window of opportunity for a socially minded sticker designer?

In the production part of this thesis, knowledge gained from the areas of contemporary digital communication, behavioral studies and social communication are combined and deployed in a self initiated design challenge, aiming to tackle the wicked problem of unhealthy lifestyles and daily diets. The artistic work includes the design and production of a product that can be seen as an experimental 21st Century social communication campaign. The result is a pack of 40 inspirational chat stickers, called Veggie Friends, designed for the Over-The-Top messaging application, LINE. Documenting the design process I have gathered information about how to design stickers in practice. I hope this thesis can therefore serve as a small guidebook for future sticker designers.
Background

The business of personal messaging has undergone a radical change during the recent years. In 2013 for the first time ever after its launch in 1982, the amount of sms messages sent and received declined worldwide. At the same time people using smartphones have been shifting to Internet based messaging services. These new kind of messaging services called Instant Messaging or Over-the-Top-Messaging offer a lot of benefits to users compared to traditional SMS technology. These features include for example real time chatting, group messaging and highly visual, entertaining features, such as stickers; graphic emotion sets that can be used as shorthand to convey emotion, or just as fun graphics to liven up an otherwise mundane conversation.

The importance of nonverbal cues to human communication has been verified repeatedly in the research literature: researchers state that i.e facial expression alone can accurately communicate emotion. Indeed, the adage “A picture is worth a thousand words” is highly relevant in today’s digital world. The way we communicate with smart phones is not only faster, but increasingly pictorial as well. Emoticons are pictorial representations used in electronic communication to convey the writer’s feelings, moods or an intended tone. Emoji and chat stickers can be seen to have developed as an extension to the widely used smileys to minimize the cold and technocratic nature of Computer-Mediated-Communication. At best this form of visual communication brings in several new layers of meaning and makes us connect with each other in new ways in the digital environment.

With Emoji-characters and stickers becoming an increasing part of communication, the need to investigate them from a graphic designer’s perspective also emerges. Visual culture expresses values and attitudes, carrying different and often deeper meanings than text. Advertisers and brands have also realized the potential of stickers, and are invading the messaging platforms. In Asia, chat stickers are already a huge business: More than just cute items, stickers have proven to be strategic too. They have proven to increase brand loyalty and create millions of revenue. People in Finland and other European countries so far have responded to the trend in a rather tentative manner.

1 Pullinen 2013, Lomas 2013
2 Horwitz 2013
3 See more in Lomas 2013
4 IPG Media Lab, 2013, Russell 2013
The food industry has used illustrated characters and mascots in marketing purposes for decades. These characters have been mainly used to advertise unhealthy food products to children and teenagers. Culture shapes food behavior and choices, as does the physical surroundings we live in too. As we spend more and more time in front of screens, it might be that the digital culture has an effect on our eating habits too. At the same time there has been a huge decline in physical activity rates of young people, muchly caused by the digital landscape we live in. These two aspects, among many others have caused a so called globesity epidemic: Childhood obesity has been labeled one of the most serious public health issues of the 21st Century. Here opens a window of opportunity for a socially minded graphic designer.

According to my research, junk food motifs are very visible in chat sticker packs too. Indeed, it is clear that policies encouraging healthy, vegetarian eating habits, as well as more active lifestyles are desirable. To quote Tatu Marttila from a lecture given in Aalto University in November 2014:

“Transformation towards sustainability is urgently needed but this calls for not only new ways of production and planning, but also new ways of meaning making. Design activity can be of help in mediating the meanings for mere sustainable existence.”

The aim of this thesis project is to try and answer to this need in a positive manner. Inspired of the new visual mobile culture and vegetarianism, I wanted to create a sticker set that would communicate the values of New Optimism; a conscious, yet positive and lively lifestyle. Reflecting on lessons learned from the areas of social psychology and sociology, it can be interpreted that individual behaviors are often shifted more effectively with subconscious prompts and nudges, and that the most powerful sources of these influences are social. Location too seems to be crucial.

**Context & Objectives**

Interpersonal digital communication is a broad phenomenon that can be framed in multiple different ways. So are the areas of food and social communication. In the first part of this thesis I will be looking into realm of contemporary digital communication and Instant Messaging environments.
on smartphones. My particular interest is in chat stickers: and emoji-characters – pictorial ways of conveying emotions and accessorising one’s messages. Since emoji characters and stickers are a rather new element in CMC, I will take some time to trace the (not so long) history of emoticons. Later on I will discuss the differences between emoji characters and chat stickers, focusing my further research on the latter. It is important to note that this thesis is not a pervasive research of contemporary digital communication either, but rather a viewpoint of some characteristics and means of our current ways of communicating in the context of interpersonal messaging.

The second part of this thesis looks into the areas of sociology and social psychology in order to understand meaning making in social communication and the ways of influencing people in our current times. Thoughts about sustainability and design activism are presented as a warm up for the actual design work.

The third part concentrates on the documentation of my artistic work. Here I will open up the design process of a socially responsible communication design concept, where stickers are used as incentives for more sustainable and healthy lifestyles. The idea is supported by the fact that the visual cues that we see daily affects our consumption choices as well as advertisers’ growing interest towards the chat sticker market. To understand the power of images as a condensed form of information, a small analysis on cultural differences and different lifestyles portrayed in existing stickers is conducted in the end of Chapter 4. Semiotics provide a wide framework to analyze images, signs and symbols. Even though this theoretical framework would have been well suited for analyzing stickers more deeply, I chose to maintain my focus of this thesis in the production part. Yet, I believe analyzing stickers through a semiotic lense would make an interesting topic for further research.

7 Kuluttajavirasto, 2013
8 IPG Media Lab, 2013
Research Methods

The character of my study is qualitative. By this research I aim to answer questions like:

1. How to design chat stickers?
2. Can chat stickers be used to influence food and lifestyle choices?
3. How to rise awareness without being preachy?

I approach the subject through literature review, the history of emoticons, a small benchmarking analysis of existing stickers and my own artistic work. Very little academic studies have been done about chat stickers. In fact, I found none. This is probably because they are such a new phenomenon. Emoticons on the other hand, have been studied extensively and a lot can be drawn upon that. Notable is however, that these researches are usually conducted in the framework of linguistics. During 2014 and 2015 research on Emoji characters has also appeared. I see these studies as good sign posts for upcoming sticker researchers. A lot of data in this thesis is gathered from different blogs and internet articles, since they provide the most up to date information about the subject.

Therefore essential literature for this thesis is provided by other disciplines such as social sciences and social psychology. A big influence has been product designer Nick Stanhope with his paper The Incidental Effect: Exploring New Methods in Behaviour Change, where he proposes that the best way to create positive behaviour change is for designers to design the behaviour into desirable products. Another key reference is Malcolm’s Tipping Point – How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference. The design process in itself is experimental, meaning the process involves a lot of learning by doing and generation of new information through creative work.

Challenges & Terms

As stated above, there is actually no studies done about chat stickers beforehand. For me, this meant a challenge, but also one of the main reasons to grasp this topic, especially from a visual communicator’s perspective. The lack of published data and research obviously affects the character of this thesis but also makes it very interesting for me, as a researcher, to per-

9 Seemore in i.e Adams 2013, Vauras, 2006; Walther & D’Addario 2001, Yuki, Maddux & Masuda, 2006,
10 Shiftkey 2015
form as a pioneer in the field. Saying this I also acknowledge that by the time you are reading this, there probably already is more information available and this thesis might suffer from being *old news* so to say.

As mentioned earlier, the domains of visual, digital, emotional and computer mediated communication can be seen through various lenses: technical, linguistic, social, psychological or anthropological studies all provide their own views, and sometimes this has felt rather overwhelming. The subject of food and the possible perspectives to tackle it, seems even larger. As this thesis is multidisciplinary, combining these themes of food and communication, and keeping them at some balance and scope, has definitely been another challenge. At times, it has been hard to even define some sort of box for my study.

My own role as a sticker designer, being part of this research, can be seen as a possibility and a threat: At worst it might have influenced the objectivity of the research, but at the same time it can be a benefit. The areas of interpersonal, visual and emotional communication are, at the same time, very personal and universal, culture dependent and common to all humans. The factors affecting peoples food choices is even more complex, with interdependence of diverse stakeholders and conditions. All these factors have made me think that it might even be impossible to find universal answers to my research questions. That said the result of this thesis can be viewed as one possible solution, an initiative, a way of saying “*definitely maybe*”.

Various terms relating to visual-, emotional-, and digital communication is used in this thesis. Therefore some terms are good to present there:

*Emoticon* is a conventional shortening for the words *Emotion + Icon*. It is a group of characters used to represent an emotion. In this thesis, when I use the term emoticon, I am referring to it as an umbrella term for representations of facial expression or action. Originally emoticons are formed by various combinations of keyboard characters. Nowadays emoticons have developed into various kinds of graphic images used in electronic communications to convey the writer’s feelings or an intended tone. Different variations and applications can be found according to different cultures. With the use of smartphones, emoticons have become widespread.

*Emoji* Pronunciation: (emodji) is means “*picture word*” in Japanese. Emoji is a “picture language” language that was
created for Japanese text messages and web pages. With it it was possible to send lots of information in a small amount of data, enabling people to send elaborate messages over text quickly, using pictures, without clogging up the wireless data networks. Emoji are pictographs; images of things such as faces, weather, emotions or activities that are basically a list of predefined icons you can select from your keyboard that show up as pictures blending into text, defined as part of the Unicode standard.

**Stickers** Also known as *Chat Stickers* or *Virtual Stickers*. When talking about stickers in this thesis, I refer to these, not to analogue, bumper stickers. Chat stickers are elaborate, character-driven miniature cartoons, that help people emphasize their intended messages with static images or simple animations. Whereas emoji blends into the text, stickers pop out of the paragraphs and perform as independent pictures or prompts in conversations. Stickers are probably one of the most visual elements aside from actual photographs and images used in digital communication. Stickers are not a standardized picture language, but featured in-app brands of different Instant Messaging applications making them a significant way for applications to differentiate in the market and create added value for their users. Stickers are typically sold in sets, or packs, containing pictures from a dozen up to 40 images.

**IM** is an acronym for Instant Messaging. Instant messaging is the exchange of text messages through a software application in real-time. With IM software there is an inbuilt software that shows whether a chosen contact is Online and connected through the selected service. Instant Messaging differs from ordinary e-mail in the immediacy of the message exchange and also makes a continued exchange simpler than sending e-mail back and forth.

**OTT** Over-The-Top Messaging refers to a similar idea than IM. Here a third party provides instant messaging services as an alternative to text messaging services provided by a mobile network operator. Two different OTT alternatives have emerged: OS-specific communication systems such as *iMessage* and *Blackberry Messenger*, and third-party applications such as *WhatsApp* and *Kakao Talk*, which are often cross-platform. Generally speaking, both sets of applications promise a richer user experience at a price materially lower than traditional SMS messaging.
**SMS** means Short Message Service that is a text messaging service component of phone, Web, and mobile communication systems. It uses standardized communications protocols to allow fixed line or mobile phone devices to exchange short text messages.

**CMC** stands for Computer-mediated communication. It means a process where human data interaction occurs through one or more networked telecommunication systems. A CMC interaction occurs through various types of networking technology and software, including email, Internet Relay Chat (IRC), instant messaging (IM), and Over-The-Top Messaging (OTT) to mention a few.

**FTF** refers to "traditional", face-to-face interaction between people.
A new generation has grown up with new technologies to a ubiquitous world. The invention of the Internet and the smartphone have transformed the way people communicate with each other in a profound way. The effects in the media landscape among many others have been radical.

In this chapter, I will open up some characteristics and means of the contemporary digital communication landscape. Here, my particular interest lay in Instant Messaging and Over-The-Top Messaging applications in particular. The topic of emotional communication will be discussed briefly.

Emoticons can be seen as equivalent of nonverbal cues in Instant Messaging applications and social media platforms. As emoticons become more widespread in CMC, a vocabulary of symbols emerges across different cultures. In the end of this part I will retrace the historical timeline of different emoticons and concentrate more fully on the popular Emoji characters and the even more visual chat stickers.
2. Contemporary Digital Communication

“Our phones, always connected and always with us, have become incredibly personal. They belong to us, to an extent that no previous device ever achieved. Because of that we belong to them too and it’s a bond that shapes us at the deepest level – in how we express ourselves, in what we hold out as beautiful and compelling, in how we try to emotionally connect, in ways abstract and literal, with our friends and muses.”

– Robert Capps, Wired Magazine issue 22.08

The word of communication has changed during the last decade and surely continues to change as technology together with societies policies and economics evolve constantly. The invention of the Internet as well as the smart phone have transformed the way we communicate with each other in a profound way in the developed world. The effects in the media landscape among many others have been radical; dissemination of messages, the shift from the book and the page to the screen; the shift from the older technologies to digital, electronic means; and in representation, the shift from the dominance of writing to images. In the context of interpersonal communication one could say that the change of domain has been from Face-to-Face interactions to Computer-Mediated-Communication (FTF and CMC), which in a growing matter has become a part of most peoples everyday life in the developed world. In this chapter I will discuss some characteristics of contemporary communication, mobile communication in particular and some ways it has affected interpersonal communication.
From Mass Media To Individual Lifestyles

The concept of “mass-media” in the anglophone societies seems to be a concept out of date. According to the respected professor of Semiotics, Gunther Kress, communication, social communication in particular, which used to be utilized to enhance citizenship (shared social values, aspirations, dispositions or preparation of labor force), has been framed by the interests of the global markets. Indeed, in the advanced capitalist conditions of today, the market actively fosters social fragmentation as a means of maximizing the potentials of niche markets, cites Kress\(^2\). When looking at the current market of interpersonal communication (and communication in general), one cannot but agree with the view. The smart devices, and the applications inside the hardware, are competing over user’s attention with highly visual and entertaining features. Alongside, this has created need for people to customize and personalize their interactions. The market has an interest in the development and support of distinct lifestyles, where moral and ethical concerns are increasingly left to the individual. The market sees the individual as a consumer, instead of the former notions of worker or citizen; Where identity was once was constructed though a social position and of work in a profession, today identity is formed by the exercise of choice in the market.\(^3\) In the age of the Internet and relatively little limitations to the freedom of speech, the field of contemporary communication is likely to become an area of contestation.\(^4\)

\(^2\) ibid. p.20
\(^3\) ibid. p.184
\(^4\) ibid. p.20
Millennials

Millennials, is the most commonly used term for the cohort born between 1982-2000. Based on a cursory review of the Millennial-related articles and manifestos out in the blogosphere, the general narrative of the cohort is not that flattering; Coddled and helicoptered, catered to by 24-hour TV cable networks, fussed over by marketers and college recruiters, dissected by psychologists, demographers and trend-spotters. The word Millennial, whether as noun or adjective, has monopolized the cultural conversation from the beginning of 2010’s, as advertisers and brands have been trying to crack the code to the hearts of this cohort. Millennials are said to be an über-connected, over-educated generation of selfie-taking slackers. Yet, they are also more empathetic than Gen X’s or their parents. The New York Times’ Sam Tanenhaus cites a handful of studies that suggest Millennials actually demonstrate a considerable consciousness of the bigger social and environmental picture—a certain communal sensitivity that has consequences on the way they shop, eat, work, and play.

Technology has always driven change in societies. During the last two decades, Generation Y has grown up with new technologies to a ubiquitous world. This has had an significant effect on the generations’ digital media consumption habits. They are said to be more open to embrace and more inclined to engage on mobile devices than their older counterparts. Research even implies that nearly 40 percent of Millennials in the U.S have said that losing their (smart) phone would be a bigger hardship than losing their automobile, a desktop or laptop computer, or a TV set. Reflecting on these, it is no wonder the demographic has been accused of being “addicted” to their phones. Millennials are also said to be used to adapting their technology habits to suit what is most useful or convenient for them, and it just so happens that mobile devices are the ultimate technology of convenience. This makes the generation Y peculiar as consumers and citizens, as well as apparently a curious investigation target to the marketers and advertisers. As a Millennial myself, I cannot deny that these interpretations would be far from the truth.

5 “Millennials” is a term coined by Strauss and Howe 2000
6 Fernandez 2014
7 Tanenhaus 2014
8 Fernandez 2014
9 ibid. 2014
10 Fella 2014
11 Maynard 2013
12 Fella 2014
From Artifacts to Experiences

As pointed out in the previous chapter, the world has gone digital and more precisely mobile. The most engaging thing about smart phones does not lay on the surface of the hardware, but inside the phone: in the form of applications. The smart phone performs as a platform for a various array of players that compete for peoples' attention with speed, graphic features, visuals, entertainment and different ways of personalization. For some, the smartphone has become a venue and a tool for self-expression. The media we choose to use, can be seen as reflection of our identity and as a process of meaning-making by and about ourselves and of our view of life; from the tone of voice to the style of images one uses to communicate with. The change from products to services and experiences is evident in almost all product ranges. This thesis, however, pays particular interest in the business and means of interpersonal communication in mobile environments.

From FTF to CMC

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has become everyday reality for many people. In 2014 around 40% of the world population had an Internet connection. About twenty years earlier, in 1995, it was less than 1%. In fact, in June 2014 there were 2,925,249,355 Internet users in the world, with Asia leading the way with 48.4% users. Especially in the developed countries, like the U.S The generation Y is seen as the largest segment of smartphone users; according to Nielsen experts 85% of Millennials aged 18-24 in the U.S owned a device as well as 86% aged 25-34.

Along with social, economic, cultural and technological changes, the world of communication has changed too. Face-to-face interactions, meaning “the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another’s actions when in one another’s immediate physical presence” is a concept in sociology, linguistics, media and communication describing social interaction carried out without any mediating technology. However, the tools and strategies of FTF, such as eye contact have not really been of much use in the context of digital communication. This has made the nature of online interaction a highly studied field.

*See more in Goffman 1959: The Presentation Of Self In Everyday Life

13 Capps 2014
14 Kress 2010
15 Internetlivestats.com 2015
16 Nielsen.com 2015
17 Wikipedia 2015
Various electronic media theories offer explanations for the difference between computer-mediated communication and Face-to-Face communication, including the social presence theory, media richness theory, and lack of social context cues. Social Information Processing Theory (SIP) is an interpersonal communication theory developed by Joseph Walther in 1992, explaining how people get to know one another online, without nonverbal cues, and how they develop and manage relationships in the computer-mediated environment. SIP proposes that despite the inherent lack of nonverbal cues found in online interactions, there are many other ways for people to create and process information during communication. According to SIP, users seem to have adopted equally valid and highly awarding (albeit different) ways to communicate in online settings. “Communicators deploy whatever communication cue systems they have at their disposal when motivated to form impressions and develop relationships”\(^{18}\). These can be asynchronous communication, insightful interaction, desire for impression management and maintained partner affinity, to name a few.\(^{19}\) This theoretical lens suggests that in the absence of traditional nonverbal cues people can adapt their style and language, and use other available cues to achieve their online communication goals. However, digital communication has had the handicap of often being misinterpreted as offensive. Here, visual cues come in as a handy help.

**From SMS to IM & OTT**

From its invention in 1982, text messaging, or SMS (short message service), has been seen as the “king” of mobile communication, due to its reliability and easiness; The technology is not dependent of a network, the message will find its recipient as long as one has the right phone number. Even though the channel started as an engineer channel for communicating short messages about network traffic, soon text came to be used as a channel for intimate, personal and private matters. Here, the context of communication can be seen as crucial; the research by Richard Harper and Steve Hodges suggests that it has to do with “where it arrives, and when it arrives: pushed to the hand immediately after its sending.” As an interesting contrast, an email, not that different of an application technically speaking, is considered official, long, and collegial.\(^{20}\)

With the developing technology, the culture of messaging has evolved too. In recent years people have shifted to new kinds of Instant messaging platforms. Over-the-top (OTT) messaging

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\(^{18}\) Walther, Loh, & Granka 2005 p.37 cited in To 2013 p.10-11

\(^{19}\) To 2013 p.2.

\(^{20}\) 2006 p.258
services are Instant Messaging apps which work over an Internet connection and not over a wireless network like standard SMS texts do. This can be seen as an overall trend of non-voice functions in the world of mobile communication. The name refers to the fact that consumers don’t pay carriers directly for the services, since they are used via Internet. These apps typically offer a lot more features compared to plain text messaging, featuring voice notes, camera applications, access to games and virtual stickers that are popular among teens and young adults, in other words, the Millennials. "IM apps are outcompeting carrier-provided SMS messaging because consumers, especially younger ones, want choice and flexibility...They want to be able to make their own decisions and try different things" cites Craig Wigginton, vice chairman and U.S. telecommunications sector leader for Deloitte.

**Visual Mobile Communication**

People have been using images to communicate with each other from the dawn of civilization. In the days before printing, the “illiterate” population not only possessed an important oral tradition but also had other ways of fixing and communicating that which was thought of spoken, with pictures, symbols, signs and signals forming a kind of “tribal handwriting” that was in daily use as an aid to thought, a means of comprehension and a method of bearing witness or authentication.

Visual mobile communication is messaging, that consists of, or includes visual elements in addition to typographic elements, such as text. One could argue that there is an ongoing a changing paradigm of interpersonal communication, in particular in personal mobile messaging; The way people communicate with their smartphones is not only faster, but increasingly pictorial as well. Emotional icons, such as emoticons, emoji characters, and chat stickers are pictorial representations used in electronic communications to convey the writer’s feelings, moods or an intended tone. They have developed in the attempt to minimize the technocracy of the communication experience and can be seen as an essential aspect of meaning making in CMC. Alongside the use of photographs and other imagery, emoticons and stickers can be seen as today’s tribal

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21 Adams 2013  
22 Danova 2014  
23 ibid. 2014  
24 Schneider 2013  
1 Frutiger 1989 p.221  
2 Adams 2013
handwriting, communicating with a personified style. Notable is that according to scholars mobile messaging interacting through images is closely and almost exclusively linked to one’s network of strong relationships. In this sense, intimacy is evident as a characteristic of interactions. Often the act of taking a mobile photograph and sending it to another can be linked to that of a virtual postcard. In addition choosing a picture and posting it to someone’s Facebook wall can be seen as a rather intimate gesture. Sharing picture or video content in the photo and video sharing media Instagram performs as an example too; Even though public profiles are default too, many users prefer private profiles which only community members with permission can access. The contents are predominantly documenting personal events: self portraits (sefies), food diaries, pets, baby pictures and other family album-related content, mainly meaningful to the users inner circle.

Documentation and sharing seem to be phenomenas of our current times. I often hear sentences like “If it’s not in Instagram (or other social media), it didn’t happen.” Representing reality by selecting and capturing becomes a ‘naturalized’ activity. But either of these aspects aren’t new. Anthropologically speaking, the idea of documentation and sharing is rooted deeply in human communities. Cave paintings can be seen as first evidence of this type of activity.

3 Villi & Matikainen 2007
4 Chivhanga 2014 p.91
5 Kress 2010 p.189
EMOTIONAL COMMUNICATION

The concepts of emotion and emotional expressions are labels for a wide range of behaviors and ideas. This thesis is not intended as a reference manual for the topic, yet it feels valid to look at the subject more closely in order to understand our contemporary emotional interactions better. One of the most important aspects of human life and a basic condition for survival has always been the means of expression for mutual understanding between members of a tribe or a social group. A fundamental characteristic of interpersonal communication via mobile phones is its intimacy. Indeed, according to Donald Norman, the famous advocate of user-centered design, cell phone is fundamentally an emotional tool and a social facilitator. Even if the formal content of messages were vague, the emotional content is high. Although it lets us share thoughts and ideas, what it really lets us share is emotion.

When it comes to private messaging, Norman supports this interpretation: “The point of the frequent messages is not information sharing; it is emotional connecting. They are ways of saying to one another, “I'm here,” “you are here,” “we still like each other.” People need to communicate continually, for comfort, for reassurance.” Emotional communication is not just something confined to two lovers, nor is it simply what one feels when one is sad or angry. Emotion and emotional expression are relevant to oneself, to the relationships one has, and to the groups of people who one feels belonging to.

Evidence is shown that the question of communication does not only limit itself to sending information from one another or dealing with distance. Moreover, Harper argues that messaging can be thought of as a way of sustaining and creating bonds between people. An important aspect of this development is the clear tendency among the public to prefer the pictorial messages, to purely verbal ones. This can also be seen as an interesting manifestation of post-materialistic consumption. Today, when one wants to perform a romantic gesture for their loved one, they might send them a virtual bouquet as an Emoji or a sticker instead of real flowers. Images can contain meanings, which we have used to attach to objects. A representation is enough, at least in day-to-day communication. With visual communication, we share meanings.

6 Harper & Hodges 2006
7 Kress 2010
Overview of Popular Applications

In this chapter I will introduce some Instant Messaging applications in use in smart phones globally in 2014. These applications let users communicate with images in a way or another in addition to text. The applications introduced here are in particular relevance, since 3 out of 4 represent services that have embraced the branding opportunities opened by introducing chat stickers and can be therefore seen as pioneers in their fields. What’sApp is presented due it’s dominance in the Finnish (and Western) market, and gives a good comparison to it’s Asian rivals. The applications introduced are What’s App, LINE, KakaoTalk and Facebook Messenger.

WHAT’S APP

What’sApp is a cross-platform Instant Messaging service. It is a cheap alternative to carrier-billed text messaging via SMS, especially for international or group messaging. The mobile messaging app enables users to share text, image and video messages. At the moment the service handles more than 600 million photo messages and 64 billion overall messages every day and dominates the Western markets especially in the US and Europe.²¹ Studying messaging apps closer, the report shows that outside of China, What’s App has overtaken Facebook’s Messenger to become the top global over-the-top messaging application, being used by nearly 40 % of the mobile Internet audience each month.²² What’s App does not currently feature stickers in their service, instead they are counting on the benefits of the popular emoji-characters that can be used in the app.

WE CHAT

The Chinese We Chat is the largest standalone messaging app. In 2013 WeChat had 271.9 million monthly active users.²³ We Chat supports different ways of instant messaging, including text messages, voice messages, sound messages and stickers. Users can send pictures, videos, namecards, coupons, lucky money packages or location information to ones contacts, or share them in a groupchat. The app is currently China’s official Instant

²¹ Statista.com 2015
²² Mobilemarketingmagazine 2014
²³ Millward 2013
Messaging service but has a significant amount of users also in other Asian countries, such as India and Tibet, where it has developed into a significant micro media. Group chats with up to 200 participants have offered a new way of interacting and exchanging knowledge for Tibetians who have lived under the Chinese surveillance. However, it recently turned out that Tibetan the chats have been hacked by the Chinese government. After the widespread adoption of WeChat in Tibet, there has been a disturbing correlation between the discussion of politically sensitive information and the seemingly random arrest of monks and activists. India has also recently campaigned aggressively to get local people to stop using We Chat and adopting a local App, in order to get revenues to stay inside of India and not to leak to China. With this big user amounts one can see how free messaging and reclaimed freedom of speech can spring to unexpected and notable consequences.

LINE was originally developed in Japan in the wake of the Tohoku earthquake in March 2011 as an Online messaging alternative that did not have to rely on Japan’s then-damaged telecommunications structure; When SMS and calls were unreliable during the disaster, data messaging became the primary mode of communication. After it’s release to the public in 2011, the social media reached 100 million users in only 18 months and has since then developed into a phenomenon, particularly in Japan Taiwan and South-East Asia. Apart from over-the-top messaging, LINE also offers free voice calls and thus provides an attractive alternative to paid mobile operating services. Besides facilitating communication between users, it has truly become a mobile platform incorporating different digital content including games and Manga. One of the reasons why LINE grew so rapidly was said to be because they listened closely to its users’ needs. Hyunbin Kang, the head of LINE Business Office at LINE Plus comments in Techinasia interview:

*Fig. 5 View of the my What’s App conversation with regular text and Emoji-characters used. Photographs can also be sent.*

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“I think users in Japan and the users in the world actually provide us the reason why we develop LINE and what[way] to develop Line. Our users are kinda our co-founders.”

LINE’s success hinges hugely on its rich content and user interface. Yet, one of the most important feature in LINE’s success has been their sticker characters. LINE a bunch of inapp “mascot characters” who each represent different personalities. In Japan, LINE’s kawaii characters are broadcast on TV in cartoon form and can also be found for sale as plush toys, T-shirts, and other merchandise. In the beginning of October 2014, the Japanese had 560 million users worldwide.

**KAKAO TALK**

카카오톡 in Korean, is the unofficial national communication channel of South Korea. Launched on March 18, 2010 KakaoTalk began as a messenger service, but has transformed itself into a platform that could be called a social media of its own. With 93% of South Korea’s population using KakaoTalk on their smartphones, Kakao Corp. has provided users a large range of services including games and retail commerce. After entering the market in 2010 Kakao Corp. released more than 10 services in less than three years. Starting in 2010 with a “gifting” feature that enabled users to buy gifts and coupons virtually through KakaoTalk and send it to their friends via KakaoTalk. In 2011, Plus Friend was introduced in which users receive messages, announcements, coupons from celebrities and brand name stores. The

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25 ibid. 2013  
26 Statista.com 2015  
27 ibid. 2013
app also has a gaming system, *Playing Game*, in which gaming items may be purchased.\(^{28}\) Kakao also expanded their social networking system by introducing Kakao Story, a mobile photo sharing application resembling Instagram. Kakao Style, a fashion trend and retail application, was introduced along with Choco, Kakao’s cyber money. The company revealed its first profits of $42 million in 2012 and $200 million in revenue for 2013.\(^{29}\)

**FACEBOOK MESSENGER**

In July 2014 Facebook moved their “inbox” function into a separate Facebook Messenger application. While it was effective, the company gained a lot of criticism after it announced it would be forcing users to download the app to send private messages to friends over the main Facebook service.\(^{30}\) Many were annoyed about this transition that caused extra work and worries about privacy and data loss. However, the company CEO Marc Zuckerberg commented on the change as follows; “The reason why we wanted to do this is because we believe this is a better experience. We think that messaging is becoming increasingly important so on mobile, each app can focus on doing one thing well, we think, and the primary purpose of the Facebook app is News Feed. Messaging was this behaviour that people were doing more and more, there were 10 billion messages sent every day, but in order to get to your messages, you had to open the app, which would take a few seconds, and then go to a separate tap, and we saw that the top messaging apps people were using were these dedicated focused experiences.”\(^{31}\) This clearly shows, how big of a role personal messaging has in the application business and that Facebook wants to extend their business in that direction as well. The messenger app enables regular chats, group chats, free calls, video and photo messaging and provides an increasing sticker collection with custom packs as well as licensed brand stickers, such as Snoopy or Adventure Time characters.

28 Wikipedia 2016  
29 Russel 2013  
30 Frier 2013  
31 BBC 2014
3. A Character Is Worth A Thousand Words

Throughout the last one hundred years, as technologies have changed, the importance of communication has remained high on the list of essentials. For individual communication, this has meant mail, the telephone, email, cell phones and Instant Messaging and text messaging on computers and cell phones.

– Donald Norman

Emoticons

The studies of emoticons set a good starting point for studying chat stickers. The importance of nonverbal cues to human communication has been verified repeatedly in the research literature, as researchers state that i.e facial expression alone can accurately communicate emotion. Emoticons can be seen as equivalent of nonverbal cues in Instant Messaging applications and social media platforms. Due to their communicative and linguistic character, they have mainly been studied from the point of view of linguistics, communication theories and in relation to CMC. Walther and D’addario argue that they are considered as a crucial part of CMC. It is confirmed that users reading text messages with emoticons are significantly better at interpreting the precise meaning of the author than those reading messages without emoticons.

Emoticons are also known to be used more frequently in socio-emotional contexts than in task-oriented contexts. Emotional equivalence has been shown to match well, as positive emoticons were used more in positive contexts and negative emoticons, more in negative contexts. However, emoticon

1 To 2008
2 Adams 2013 p.8
3 ibid 2013
4 To 2008
5 Adams 2013
usage decreased when people felt extreme emotions of anger or guilt, showing a tendency to drop emoticons for emotionally intense situations. At best emoticons bring in several new layers of meaning and make people connect with one-another in a richer and a more fun way in CMC environments. Aubrie Adams presents in her research *Exploring Emoticons: A Bibliographic Essay on Nonverbals in Computer Mediated Communication and Research Perspectives* four main functions that emoticons have in contemporary CMC:

1. affecting interactions positively
2. influencing message meanings
3. managing impressions
4. supplementing nonverbals

Ilmari Vauras (2006) on the other hand has categorized pragmatics of emoticons as follows:

1. Expressions of affection
2. Expressions of humour
3. Aids for tricky situations
4. Saying hello and goodbye
5. Expressing actions
6. Shortening messages

As emoticons become more widespread in computer mediated communication, a vocabulary of different symbols with subtle emotional distinctions emerges especially across different cultures. Here I present a short overview of emoticons in a chronological order. In this thesis I have divided the evolution of Emotional icons used in CMC to two generations. 1st generation emoticons are ones that have been in use starting from the 1980’s when they primarily performed in desktop conversations. The latter 2nd generation emoticons are symbols that have been developed for communication purposes in smartphones.

**1st Generation Emoticons (from 1980’s)**

It is generally accepted that the common sideways smiley face in use today was invented by Scott Fahlman on September 19th 1982, in the department of computer science at the Carnegie Mellon University. Fahlman originally suggested the use of this emoticon :-) after funny and humorous posts on the message board and the use of this emoticon :-( for every thing else that was not meant to be funny and all serious remarks in a message board conversation.
The frowning face emoticons used today are meant as an indication of anger and sadness instead. Not long after, dozens of variations were being created and used on boards across the Internet. Nowadays, thousands of text and graphical emoticons are in use and everyday more are being created and circulated on the web worldwide.¹

**WESTERN STYLE**

The etymology of the word emoticon refers to the English words emotion and icon. Emoticons are representations of facial expression such as :-) (a smile), formed by various combinations of keyboard characters and used in electronic communications to convey the writer’s feelings or intended tone. The western Emoticons are set sideways to the text and read in an angle of 90 degrees either from the right or from the left. :-) (-:)² Today, majority of the digital communication platforms are able to convert these established typographic emoticons into graphic representations. When converted, they are legible in a horizontal position instead of a vertical.

**JAPANESE STYLE**

The Japanese equivalent to the emoticon is a text-related art form called kaomoji (顔文字). (literally face (顔) letters (文字)). The pictures are all done with actual text characters, that are pulled from hundreds of different languages.³ These emoticons and other pictures can be understood without tilting one’s head to the left. These emoticons are usually found in a format similar to (*_*) or ^_^ The asterisks indicate the eyes; the central character, commonly an underscore, the mouth; and the parentheses, the outline of the face. Japanese kaomoji can also be formed from Kanji characters, such as ^ワ^ (big smile).⁴

**KOREAN STYLE**

The Korean emoticons are also horizontal emoticons. They are formed by using the Korean alphabet, Hangul, and have a distinct look all their own. For example ^о^ equals to “happy face” and ¦_¦ means “surprised”.⁵

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¹ ibid. 2014  
² Wikipedia 2015, Vauras 2006  
³ Tofugu.com 2015  
⁴ Vauras 2006  
⁵ Seoulistic.com 2015, Kissmykimchi.com 2010
**SMILEYS**

Smiley are graphic emoticons. The classic Smiley arrived in the early 1970’s. Within a perfect circle, there is the simplest, most childlike depiction of a happy face: two vertical, oval eyes and a large, upturned semi-circular mouth. The Smiley has travelled far from its early 1960’s origins, changing like a constantly mutating virus: from early 70’s fad to late 80’s acid house culture, from Millennial texting option to serial killer signature and ubiquitous emoticon. Today hundreds of thousands of graphic smileys for different expressions have been created for Internet use, many of them animated.

**2nd Generation Emoticons (from 2000’s)**

**EMOJI**

Emoji (Japanese: 色文字 (えもじ); (Japanese pronunciation: [emodzii]) are the ideograms and smileys originally developed and used in Japan. Meaning pictograph, the word emoji literally means “picture” (e) + “character” (moji). Emoji is a computer language created to send lots of information in a small amount of data. The aim of the original 176 picture set of 12 x 12 pixels was to cover the entire breadth of human emotion to assist communication in in Japanese electronic messages and web pages in the late 1990’s. The characters are divided into different themes: plants, food, animals, transport and different kinds of miscellaneous symbols. The idea of the pictures were to serve as symbols “something closer to letters, that wouldn’t feel out of place if you slipped them into a sentence.” As the designer of original Emoji, Shigetaka Kurita puts it.

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6  Savage 2009, Wikipedia 2014
7  Wikipedia 2015
8  Korpela & Salmén 2015
9  Blagedon 2013
Since 2011, the Emoji language has become widespread globally after some of the characters were coded into the unicode system, the computer industry standard for encoding and displaying most of the world’s writing systems. This means they can be downloaded as a keyboard, letting people use them in smartphones across different applications. During the last couple of years, the characters have gained huge popularity in the Western world too.\textsuperscript{10} They have become a visible feature of popular visual culture and CMC, with far-reaching impacts on our society. In addition to private conversations, today Emoji is widely used from work life to school life, as well as in home environments and the capitalist media landscape.

That being said it is clear that a multi-faceted economy has been built around them.\textsuperscript{11} Yet, as with any widespread influx of characters to an ecosystem, their arrival has also presented some challenges.\textsuperscript{12} Due to their Japanese origin, many of the characters are very specific to the Japanese culture, such as a bowing businessman, a face wearing a face mask, a white flower used to denote “brilliant homework,” or a group of emoji representing popular foods: ramen noodles, dango, onigiri, Japanese curry, and sushi. From the perspective of a western person, this sometimes causes misunderstandings, misinterpretations and even confusion in communication situations. For example, the “high five” --emoji is one of the most popular icon among hundreds of the ubiquitous characters, but it seems people can’t agree on what it means.\textsuperscript{13} In the western world the image has commonly been interpreted and turned into a sign of praying hands, indicating “thank the lord”, with the “golden” rays of light emphasizing the impression. However, the original meaning of the symbol is said to mean “thank you”, or high fiving, as the name indicates. Some research has been done about the characteristics of emoji usage according to different nationalities. A research conducted by Swiftkey in 2015 revealed, for example, that one of the most used emoji characters in Finland is the so called “black moon”, which can be seen as a representation of the polar night. Also the face with tears of joy --emoji is popular, as it is one of the most used emojis around the world.\textsuperscript{14}

During the recent year or two Emoji characters have also invaded Offline space and they have been used a lot outside of the traditional CMC context. The Internet has seen a variety

\textsuperscript{10} Dissolve 2014, Yle.fi 2015
\textsuperscript{11} Dissolve 2014
\textsuperscript{12} ibid. 2014
\textsuperscript{13} Yang 2014
\textsuperscript{14} Halminen 2015
of memes “*emojified*”, and the new age of electronic messaging continues to revolutionize the realms of language with a new phenomenon known as emoji storytelling. Emoji storytelling has become so popular that Herman Melville’s “Moby Dick” was translated into emoji through crowd-sourcing efforts organized by Fred Benenson; called *Emoji Dick*, the book was added to the Library of Congress as its first ever emoji book in 2014. Artists and Advertisers alike have embraced them and utilized them to highlight messages. Carla Gannis’ work is almost terrifying and grotesque, with bubbly smiley faces and skeuomorphic objects replacing the classic art iconography.

“*Emoji have reached critical mass,*” says Zoë Salditch, communications director at Eyebeam Art + Technology Center. She’s right, emoji seems to be everywhere. The emoji characters have also received critique from the international audience, claiming the imagery to be discriminating and white/yellow-suprematist. This caused the Unicode Consortium and Apple to update the Emoji character set in iOS 8.3 so that it now features a range of skin tone options and a new “neutral” default of yellow, which is required by the Unicode specification to be “non-realistic.” There’s also a ton of new family emojis to cover off different family composition and same sex parents.

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15 Lureoflanguage.com
16 Williams, 2015, Telegraph 2015
4. Stickers

“How would you say it made you feel to get these creatures doing things (compared to a plain text saying “I love you”) when I texted you? “It was so much better... It felt fuller... than if you would have sent something... I mean, somebody telling you love them, it is a great and wonderful, beautiful thing, but getting those stickers, those emojis was a sort of different experience.”

– Alex Goldmark and his girlfriend Eliza on their one month experiment of only communicating with emoji.

Chat stickers can be seen as a version 2.0 of the emoticon. Stickers are larger-scale images which are primarily used in Instant Messaging chats. They are elaborate, character-driven miniature cartoons, that help people emphasize their intended messages with static images and simple animations. Stickers have slightly different functions than their cousin, Emoji: Even though stickers are primarily used to convey emotions, they can also be used to represent actions. These are things people might encounter during the day from coffee drinking, to working and a myriad of different hobbies. Since stickers predominantly represent characters, they are able to portray body language in addition to facial reactions. The style of stickers often are cheeky and humorous, exaggerated like cartoon characters.

Whereas Emoji blends into the text, stickers pop out of the paragraphs and perform as independent pictures or prompts in conversations. Within the multimodal richness of CMC, stickers are probably one of the most visual elements aside from actual photographs and images. They allow users to personalize their messages by choosing a suitable set or character for different occasions, and convey meanings with the chosen visual style of the stickers they use to express values or taste. The same way all products of visual culture, also stickers can be seen as a way for oneself to express their identity. This might be one reason why they are taken so seriously by brands and advertisers.2

1 Van Grove 2013
2 Russel 2013
The over-all amount of stickers today in different applications is mind blowing. Despite of the visual and stylistic variety in the field, a list of core functions can be extracted from the packs. Majority of characters in the packs tend to represent a similar range of emotions and actions. Based to my empirical research in different applications (Path, LINE, KakaoTalk, FB) as well studies conducted on emoticons \(^3\) I was led to divide the pragmatics of stickers to following categories:

- **Expressing affection** *(managing relationships)*
- **Expressing basic human emotions** *(happy, surprise, fear, disgust, anger, and sad)*
- **Expressing Actions** *(daily actions, representing lifestyles)*
- **Expressing cultural signs** *(nationality, sub cultures)*
- **Shortening** *(simple expressions of like, dislike, yes, no, ok)*
- **Greetings** *(Hello, good bye)*
- **Expressing humour**

These functions may overlap in different categories. For example, humour can be part of managing relationships and certain daily activities or food choices may express cultural sings.

\(^3\) Vauras 2006, Adams 2013
What’s this sticker business all about?

A big distinction to the previously described emoji, is that stickers are not a standardized picture language, but featured in-app brands of different instant messaging applications. Stickers typically come in packs containing pictures from a dozen up to 40 images, most of which are free to download and use. But they are also a significant way for applications to differentiate in the market and create added value for their users. Applications such as LINE and KakaoTalk have been very successful in turning their mascots and characters into revenue makers and a lucrative business for companies, and possibly for the designers as well. Especially LINE has been extremely smart in developing different personalities for each of its sticker characters. Many applications have premium and special packs — which may be customized for brands, products or limited edition events that users can buy. Some applications, like Path, have a limited collection of free stickers but clearly aim for selling the premium service, which gives users more options, for example a bigger library of different stickers.

STICKER DESIGNERS AS BRAND DESIGNERS

For the designer, a successful sticker character may spring versatile merchandising opportunities and a possibility to create a brand that eventually starts living their own lives. Molang, a character designed by Hye-ji-Yoon for KakaoTalk has become so popular that it has made its way outside of the virtual chat room and into the real world in the form of smartphone cases, plush toys and other accessories.

“I began to promote my character ‘Molang’ in the very early days, when people just began to decorate their smart phones with cute character contents. At the time, it wasn’t common for artists to offer their character content for free. Naturally, Molang gained popularity between younger teenage girls who had relatively low purchasing power. It became a popular character for decorating mobile phones. It was then, that KakaoTalk opened an items store that offered emoticons and themes to users. Molang was one of the first characters to be featured in the items store.”

Another good example is Pusheen, the cat that has practically become an Internet sensation. Pusheen was created by artists

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4 Wee 2013
5 Russel 2013
6 Horwitz 2013

Fig. 13 Sticker character Molang turned into one strip comic and illustrations for different stationery products.
Clare Belton and Andrew Duff as a character in their webcomic *Everyday Cute*\textsuperscript{2012}, and has now become known among a wider audience as a sticker character in *Facebook Messenger* service. The comics revolved around the lives of the characters modeled after Belton, Duff, their yellow dog named Carmen and Pusheen, a chubby gray tabby cat based on Belton’s childhood cat.\textsuperscript{7} In August 2013, Pusheen’s official Facebook page had more than 1 million likes and the official Twitter account has more than 60,000 followers.\textsuperscript{8} The www.pusheen.com page includes numerous Pusheen products for sale from apparel to stationary and paper products.

There’s a lot of reasons why stickers have become so popular in a short amount of time. Apart from their expressive and decorative features, stickers are efficient. Pictures have the power to show the message at once in its entirety and in an encapsulated form.\textsuperscript{9} Multiple examples from visual communication and the popularity of emoji characters advocate this fact. Stickers enable users to spend less time tapping out words on a phone, making communication easier and more rapid. Japanese Kanji is tricky to input digitally as is Korean Hangul and Chinese characters.\textsuperscript{10} Speed and efficiency are also valued in the western communication culture, making stickers an apt way to shorten messages, without making the interaction dull or rude. Similarly to emoticons, stickers are also a way of managing impressions and relations.\textsuperscript{11} They may also facilitate relationship or friendship development\textsuperscript{12} and help to ease communication when facing language barriers. But stickers have their limitations too. As the user dives into the sticker stores of different applications, new kind of needs start to rise; Questions like “Who is choosing what images I get is my vocabulary, ‘cause it’s affecting what I can say?” or “Is this the array of emotions I am supposed to have? “come to my head.

Worries about expressional fatigue are also understandable. When communicating with stickers and other images viewers no longer have to create their own images, as is the case with readers and listeners. According to Adrian Frutiger “The picture is a finished product that rules out the act of imagination and causes a far reaching impoverishment of the human faculty of the “mind’s eye”\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Knowyourmeme 2015
  \item ibid. 2015
  \item Frutiger 1989 p.224
  \item Russel 2013
  \item Adams 2013
  \item Peña & Hancock 2006, cited in To 2008
  \item 1989 p.224
\end{itemize}
I predict that as sticker usage starts to gain more global popularity, users might start to ask for more personalising features. People probably will want to design their own, signature sets, expressing their own visual style or stickers from their own faces, like different “mood selfies” Applications allowing users to draw and supporting users own drawing uploads could be some logical future developments in the field. The Taiwanese App “Cubie” is leading the way; It already has the feature of enabling users to create their own stickers and tweaking them. Imoji is an external application that let’s people create their own sticker-like pictures by clipping cut-out shaped selfies from photographs. Users can also discover “trending” images by browsing a database of all user generated stickers in the app.¹⁴

In the end I see chat stickers as a phenomena telling about the ever evolving field of visual communication and language. As the spoken language develops and changes all the time, it is only natural that the ways of communicating digitally do too. Together with the developing technology, they create new possibilities and ways for people to interact with each other. The experiment of Alex Goldmark and his girlfriend using only Emoji to communicate with each other for one month is a perfect example of this. Also, the natural need for people to express how they feel, or using a tone of voice, is hardly only a part of the youth’s communication. However, to me it feels that the limitations of sticker communication lay in the range of emotions the current stickers are portraying. Aligning what Alex Goldman said about his experience, it feels that even though there are tons of pictures to choose from, the characters seem to be designed for a “teenage range of emotions”, making it difficult to convey feelings of grief, sadness or other “serious” expressions. This however, may also be an impatient interpretation. By Summer 2015, LINE has already seen some images that tap into a trend called kimo-kawaii, combining cuteness with darker emotions, such as gross or off-putting elements, such as this slightly twisted birthday party sticker on the right.¹⁵

Fig. 15 Example of a kimo-kawaii sticker; at this birthday party Sally is calling the shots.
CAN GRANDMOTHER CHAT WITH STICKERS?

As stated before in this thesis, there are significant differences in chatting and texting habits of different age groups. This brings up a valid question: Are chat stickers designed for adults or are they products for teenagers and young people? Even though there is an increasing selection of different sticker styles available in different applications, a generation gap between the ways different age groups are communicating is still visible. Where Generation X’s and Baby Boomers have been used to the plain text, Millennials have adapted chat stickers as a natural extension to their digital communication.

Talking about impression management and interpretation, some scholars have suggested utilizing a flexible approach to emoticon practice, which can be adopted to sticker use as well; F. B. Krohn, advised that when chatting, individuals should consider the generation of the message recipient. He made very specific claims on when it was appropriate to use emoticons: for Traditionalists (born before 1946) and Baby-Boomers (1946-1964), he claimed that it was likely not appropriate to include emoticons at all. Then again those within Generation-X (1964-1980) and Millennials (1980-2000 and after), he thought it was suitable to be generous with emoticons. Essentially, Krohn advised that individuals ought to consider her or his own impression management and do so with care. Although the generational divide may or may not be justified, the literature demonstrates that individuals have utilized emoticons to manage impressions with varied strategies. The latter may be apt when talking about sticker use as well. However, a blog post from Soon Aik from Netizentesting.com tells a different story;

“In the subway or even in the barbershop, I witnessed scenes where some 40 to 50 year-old uncles and aunties were visiting the LINE sticker store on their smartphones or tablets, the only difference was that they called them ‘cartoons’ instead of ‘stickers’. They were discussing with their peers on how they interact with their children using those stickers.”

Chatting with stickers may be considered more likely an act of generational, than a developmental behaviour. As technology develops and as Millennials get older, chat stickers will probably eventually be in use in majority of smartphones. From the point of usability, one could argue that senior citizens could actually be highly potential users for stickers. Communicating

1 as cited in Adams 2013 p.15-16
2 ibid. 2013
3 Gladwell in Koetsier 2015
with big, predefined images might even be a relief for the tired eyes and impaired fine motor skills, compared to traditional texting; Things like exactitude and a weakened sight could be resolved with the use of stickers. Visual style and character design can be used to appeal to different demographics and target groups. For example, when looking at the Facebook Messenger’s sticker store in 2014, one can see that a character called Skullington is clearly designed for a teen audience. Here kawaii cuteness is combined with a youthful motif, the skull, cherished as an icon by several rock genres, it communicates many potential meanings without specifying any single one: the skull is a style hedge. On the contrary stickers based on fan culture and icons such as seasonal packs of the World Cup 2014 in FB or LINE’s Paul McCartney stickers appeal to a much broader audience. and earlier mentioned Kimo Kawaii characters may provide a way to express feelings you can’t (and probably shouldn’t) spell out in words. Facebook has also taken a nice stand on the issue of equality, with a Pride theme set that was launched on Pride Weekend in 2014, designed by Cathy Lo.

Reading Stickers

When I first discovered stickers in 2014 as an exchange student in Seoul, I thought the idea of them was fun, but felt the visual language and the expressions of the characters in KakaoTalk did not appeal to me. It wasn’t until I found Facebook Foxes, designed by Jayden Fish that the use of stickers actually grew into me. Later I figured that there were logical reasons I didn’t understand all of the Korean and Japanese characters used in KakaoTalk and LINE. To make oneself more easily understood through culture barriers, human beings decompose their communication to a collection of signs that are transmittable and immediately understandable. The most important messages and used expressions are often condensed into conventional signs, that express emotions and reactions in a deeper and a much more dramatic way than in traditional oral communication. Critics may say that the success of stickers and Emoji goes with their semantic poverty and Codogenet even implies that people are heading towards some “zero degree” of communication. I on the contrary do not see this as a threat. Even

4 Colman 2006
5 IPG Media lab 2013
6 Shu 2015
7 Codogenet 2015
8 ibid 2015
9 ibid 2015
though it might be easy to giggle at stickers, (The name already refers to a juvenile product somewhere between toys and stationery) they do have a potential to express a wide, complex, and often bemusing array of ideas and emotions. Throughout history, every form of communication has developed its own shorthand, from Renaissance paintings with rich symbolism to Victorians folded calling card corners. According to my research, stickers are rich in expression, using cultural, visual signs and symbols.

**CULTURAL SIGNS IN STICKERS**

Cultural signs are diverse. They include gestures, facial expressions, slogans, road signs, fashion, music, design architecture etc. According to Lager, compared to linguistics, visual language can articulate a complex combination of meanings created from small particles. Even though most signs are often iconic (resembling what they mean and therefore leading to almost universal understanding) reading signs is very much dependent of context. A picture of a smiley face can indicate that the writer is pleased or joking, but only in the context of electronic communication. In another context it might be a symbolic sign, referring to a psychedelic drug or acid house music. According to Peirce, there are three kinds of signs: Iconic, symbolic and indexical. Indexical signs express meaning by an indicative or causative relation, such as the index finger when pointing. In contrast, symbolic signs convey meaning through cultural agreement alone, such as words or for example some of the gestures found in the emoji lexicon, i.e the earlier mentioned “high fiving” / praying hands.

Many of the gestures and graphic emblems seen in stickers incorporate symbolic signs that might be opaque for those who have not learned their symbolic meaning. For example the gigantic sweat drops conveying embarrassment or bloody noses depicting lust (indicating sexual thoughts), both visible in the symbolic imagery of chat stickers coming from Japan and South-Korea. According to Cohn, the iconicity of images gives the illusion that all drawings are universal and easy to understand, since they can mimic the character of objects in our daily perception. But as stated above, the representations of emotions, expressions and lifestyles are very much culture related. Especially in the Japanese visual language many graphic signs which are used to represent invisible qualities
such as emotions or motion, extend beyond iconic representations. Cohn reveals that signs can come in two forms, as highly conventional graphic emblems, like “sweeping lines to show motion and bubbles encapsulating text to show speech” or as non-conventional visual symbols or metaphors that may take many forms. In conventional depictions of rage or anger, characters may grow sharp fangs and pointy claws while fire erupts behind them. Other emblems are far more opaque to those who have not learned their symbolic meaning. This means that to interpret the intended meaning of a sticker, the reader has to be familiar with the metaphors of the images in order to decode them. Apparently, I was unfamiliar with these metaphors in 2014. For a designer, this means that some cultural insight is needed in order to design for these markets:

“To design stickers for, say, Japanese audience, you need to have some understanding of Japanese culture... In Japan they have a very different way to express feelings through pictures. For example, expressing perverted thoughts is visualized with nosebleed in Japan”

comments Miila Westin, a Finnish designer aiming for Japanese sticker markets in LINE’s Creators Market. Below Neil Coen presents a small sampling of how graphical emblems and their meanings work in the Japanese visual language:

“The sweat drop” character is another good example of a Japanese graphic emblem not so opaque to those unfamiliar with its meaning. The particular variant expresses feelings of shyness, embarrassment, confusion, or exasperation, as the first image on the second row shows. The sweat marks are thought

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13 ibid. p. 7
to have originated from Japanese anime, where characters in anime often exhibit large sweat drops on their heads or beside their eyes in embarrassing moments.”

This expression has become more familiar with western audience just recently, after the emoji lexicon has become common. Contrary to the Japanese representation, a wary brow and a wary averted gaze can be thought as indicators of shyness in the Western visual language. Korean and Japanese visual language have a lot in common since they both draw from the Japanese anime and manga tradition. However, both of them also have their own peculiarities in their visual language compared to each other. This picture below of KakaoTalk’s *Kakao Friends* can be used as a good example of Korean graphic emblems:

![Korean visual expressions](image)

The picture shows four stickers with different expressions: joy, satisfaction, anger and thankfulness. However, from my Finnish cultural perspective, I would never have interpreted them as so. In fact, my personal interpretation of the images would be; 1) Saying thank you, possibly in a deeply respective manner. In the Japanese tradition, the same image could be interpreted as an expression of gratitude “I owe you one” or “pleased to meet you & let’s get along”. For me, the second one is clearly expressing excitement. A Japanese interpretation on the other hand would be huge admiration. The sticker could incorporate the word “hoshiii!!!!” to emphasize how thrilled the person saying this is. The watery eyes can also refer to reminiscing something nice touched, yet in this case the mouth probably wouldn’t be as open as in this picture. The third image depicting anger is the most evident to me. This picture share’s some signifiers with Japanese anime imagery; “the crosses on the forehead of the character express being pissed off. The hand is shaking in an indication of wanting to punch someone”. The last image is showing thankfulness. This again, is very hard to interpret. To me it looks like the character is bursting to laughter and emphasizing the gesture with holding it’s stomach with its hands.

14 Park, Barash, Wink & Cha 2013
15 Westin 2015
16 ibid. 2015
17 ibid. 2015
Japanese visual language seems to be very common in sticker designs, even when the designer and the user might be based in the western world. For example, as David Lanham was approached by Facebook to develop the platform’s default smiley set titled Meep, he drew inspiration from the Japanese kawaii style that’s already common among stickers on other chat applications.  

“It was my own personal decision [to seek inspiration from Japanese design], not Facebook’s. [Japanese artists] have really mastered paring down an emotion to its most basic features and exaggerating it.” – David Lanham

One of the most distinctive difference between portraying basic human emotions in the eastern and western cultures is in the way facial expressions are represented. A study conducted by Masaki Yuki, William W. Maddux and Takahiko Masuda (2006) showed that depending on an individual’s cultural background, facial cues in different parts of the face were weighted differently when interpreting emotions. Given that the eyes are more difficult to control than the mouth when people express emotions, they predicted that individuals in cultures where emotional subduction is the norm (such as Japan) would focus more strongly on the eyes than the mouth when interpreting others’ emotions. By contrast, they made evidence that people in cultures where overt emotional expression is the norm (such as the US) would tend to interpret emotions based on the position of the mouth, because it is the most expressive part of the face.

Fig 16 Different expressions of KakaoTalk’s Neo Cat show how expressions are built visually with a focus on the eyes.
Looking at stickers from South Korea, Japan and the US, this difference is evident. The Korean KakaoFriends are very expressive in their eyes – in fact there are so many different eye expressions I didn’t even understand majority of them. Unfamiliar with Korean emblems beforehand, I might have been unconsciously looking for a more expressive mouth and therefore felt the style foreign to me. On the contrary, looking at Jayden Fish’s Facebook Foxes I was immediately familiar with the expressions portrayed. The character’s eyes are more minimalistic than for example Neo’s, but the thing that really makes me understand the expressions is the rich body language the fox is utilising.

Not being able to “crack” the cultural code may lead to confusion, but also to interesting new interpretations. Shigetaka Kurita, the inventor of the Japanese Emoji characters expresses curiousness how the characters are used by people from different cultures as follows:

“I’d really like to know to what degree they’re used in the same way, and to what degree there’s a local nuance. I think the heart symbol is probably used the same way by everyone, but then there are probably things that only Japanese people would understand, or only Americans would understand... It would be great if we could compare, and have that lead to people starting to use things in the same way.”

As people from different cultures start to adapt images to their own culture and localising signs, it opens up opportunities for new ways of meaning making. Next I will analyse some inspirational sticker characters as benchmarking examples of how different meanings and lifestyles are visible in different sticker characters.
Case study 1
Facebook Messenger / Facebook Foxes

Facebook Foxes is a sticker set custom designed for Facebook by designer and illustrator Jayde Fish. According to the designer, the character is based on the wild foxes that live on the Facebook campus. The images are free to use in Facebook chats. It is one of the first stickers ever released in the messenger application. FB Foxes can be seen as a pioneering representative of a so-called western style in the sticker field. The illustrations style is “flat”, which is characteristic to today’s digital design due to its easy scalability. The sympathetic fox character is varied in the sticker set. The thing that makes it so well designed in my opinion is that the expressions and actions are vague enough suit many purposes; They are open to interpretation so they can be used in various situations.

The fox character is an unisex, anthropomorphic animal, making it an agile creature to perform feminine and masculine actions and expressions, appealing to a wide audience. Supporting the previously stated difference to Asian eye-centrism in emotional expression, the FB Foxes have small and very simple eyes, leaving room for expression to be created by

Fig 20 Facebook Foxes uses a wide range of body language to express emotions and actions.
postures and the nose. Food is also present in Facebook Foxes. In one sticker the fox is cooking, the other pictures it licking an ice cream popsicle. In the third sticker he/she is dreaming of a pizza slice. Notable is that, once again, food is present mainly in the form of junk food.

The pragmatics of stickers are also filled in the Facebook Foxes pack. The fox expresses affection through cuddling and hugging, as well as having heart symbols incorporated in some of the stickers. Basic human emotions are not clearly portrayed. Moreover, the foxes demonstrate reactions, such as blushing or shock. This seems apt, considering that stickers are often used to react to incoming information. The foxes also express a number of different activities from jogging to painting and spying. A peeking fox and a sitting one holding a flag saying “Hi” can clearly be interpreted as greetings and humour is visible throughout the pack: Many of the stickers are humorous and funny by nature, for example the one where the fox is skateboarding or the one where it is sneaking take out lunch dressed up as a ninja.

Today Facebook has increased their sticker collection with packs clearly targeted to men and women separately; i.e Hacker girl and Hacker boy characters in solo packs as well as Power Rangers clearly targeted to men accompanying the cute Pusheen, the titular gray tabby cat created by Claire Belton.

Case study 2

LINE / Cony the Rabbit

The Japanese social network LINE has one of the biggest collections of stickers. The chat application has custom Emoji-characters as well as a library full of various stickers from in-house designers. In addition to the app's own characters and licensed international brands (such as Snoopy, Disney - and various manga characters) they are so far the only company with a Creators’ Market – a sticker shop where users can upload and sell their own stickers. In March, 2015 there were 48 367 stickers on sale, which can be seen as a sign of a trend that people do want to design their own ways of interacting. According to LINE, there are 7 billion daily messages and over 1 billion stickers sent by worldwide users.

The brands most distinctive feature is their own group of LINE characters. LINE has designed simple characters and has used them consistently across all communication and marketing mediums. This strategy has given LINE strong competitive advantage.
over their competitors. The company has been able to build an overall brand experience through its main characters.21

“The time that we put into the design with things like stickers, and the overall reaction that users get from our App, really makes Line stand out”, says the company’s affable COO Takeshi Idezawa.22

LINE stickers are available both animated and static images, but pay packs are usually animated. The characters of LINE provide an interesting cross-section to the modern Japanese social life.23 The hard working Japanese society is represented through the cute and simple characters in a humorous way. Through the stickers, users can easily create narratives identifying with the pressures of job hunting or the life of a salaryman. On the other hand sub-cultures fancying bishounen, (androgyne pretty boys, nowadays a significant part of Japanese pop culture) are presented, as one of LINE’s characters called James. Conspicuous consumption is praised. Notable is also the amount of “Love” and “Dating” themed editions, which is an interesting contrast to the current social crisis of the nation, where less and less young people are interested in romantic relationships.24 From the 28 LINE character sets available, 9 are representing dating imagery. On the other hand this reflects well the main functions of stickers as relationship managers and builders.

**CONY**

Cony can be seen as a representation of a modern Japanese woman turned into a rabbit; a career oriented, emancipated woman.25 A notable contrast to many other female sticker characters, Cony is represented as an active doer and feeler. In the sticker imagery, she is pictured exhausting herself at work and making it up to herself with shopping. She also travels, does breakdance, runs and multitasks. Cony shows a wide range of emotions and clearly has ups and downs in her life. She is dating Brown the bear, another LINE character, who is known for having just one face with very limited emotional expression. (Can this be seen as a reference to the national crisis of the lost Japanese manhood?) Cony and Brown appear together in multiple dating packs where romance is capitalized: love is expressed by buying expensive gifts and...
big romantic gestures. The characters also play around with stereotypical relationship situations, for example getting mad at each other and then making up, which makes it seem like it is mainly designed to be used for romantic conversations. Food is present at times in Cony’s life. Usually in forms of different Japanese specialities. One image even shows her buying carrots, another making juice out of them, indicating some sort of healthy diet. It is clear that Cony is a product of the land of Manga. The drawing style incorporates many distinguishable elements of Japanese Visual Language, such as the sweeping motion lines and metaphorical emblems.

Case study 3

*KakaoTalk / Jay-G*

Kakao Talk’s in-house characters are named Kakao Friends. At first sight they resemble a bit LINE’s characters. Similar as LINE’s sticker store, KakaoTalk also has a variety of different stickers, as well as licensed stickers. The visual style resembles LINE’s characters but in the characters, Korean lifestyles and cultural signs are clearly visible. What is peculiar to Kakao Talks other stickers apart from Kakao Friends, is the visibil-

**Fig 23** Some examples of Cony in LINE stickers. The images open an interesting viewpoint to the world of a modern Japanese woman.
ity of local Pop-idols in the packs. Korea’s best loved K-pop sensations are often cut out and modified into branded stickers of their own. The actions and expressions also are peculiar, clearly representing a unique culture. Some of them are animated gifs with quirky effects, some static.

A general assumption is that stickers are cute and girly. However, thinking about their popularity and the amount of users LINE characters and Kakao Friends have, I believe gender neutrality is one of their keys to success. In both Applications and series there are both sexes represented and the characters are clearly targeted to a unisex audience portraying a wide range of social and cultural expressions and peculiarities.

Jay-G is clearly a male character. In his narrative, he is a secret agent by day, and a hip-hop star by night. This sticker character can be seen as a representation of a young, male Seoulite: He does karaoke (“no-rae-bang”), eats chimek (a popular combination of chicken and beer), ramen noodles and enjoys his espresso coffee in a suit fitting like a glove. Notable is that the Korean meat dominated food kitchen is visible in this pack, with no vegetarian imagery. When walking the streets of Hongdae, in Seoul 2014, I could see guys like Jay-G a lot. Working hard buy day and being able to be a party like a hip hop star buy night seems like a way of visualizing the hyperdynamic Korean culture, where businesses are open 24/7. A nap
can be taken in a *Jimjilbang*, a Korean Spa, where one can not only enjoy the spa, shower, and sauna but also sleep overnight at an affordable price. The name of the character can be also be interpreted as an localisation of hip-hop culture: Turning Jay-Z into Jay-G would fit the Korean way of adapting western influences and making them their own in an apt way.

Some Japanese visual emblems are visible in the expressions of emotions, such as blushing and laughing out loud with tears in the characters eyes. Also motion lines are in use. However, there are some clearly Korean expressions too. These I am not able to interpret. For example one image with a tongue-in-cheek expression and an unfamiliar hand gesture.

These benchmarking examples show how chat stickers carry cultural signs, portraying local lifestyles in an interesting way but also pointing out how cultural insight is needed in order to decode the emotion and meanings conveyed. In the next chapter I will dive into the area social communication in order to gain knowledge on how to influence people in the 21st Century.
Social Communication in the 21st Century

Changing people’s behaviour is not an easy task and history has seen a lot of failed attempts in the field of Social Communication. As a visual communication designer I am curious, do pictures really have persuasive, or manipulative features on us? Could awareness be raised in a non-preachy tone-of-voice? If so, how is it done? Can the tools of advertising and branding be used to design change in people’s consumption patterns towards less consuming and more sustainable lifestyles?

One of the aims of this Master’s thesis is to try and influence people’s lifestyle choices in an incidental way. I am curious to see, weather the sticker characters I design, could serve as ambassadors in peoples private conversations to help them pursue more healthy lifestyles. To gain answers to these questions, I present a literature review from the fields of social psychology and sociology. Lessons from these areas are used to support the design work later on.
5. Influencing people in the 21st Century

Changing people’s behaviour and consumption patterns are challenging to change. Especially difficult it is when the culture is not supportive or when facing an attitude of opposition. Yet, it can be argued that policy which encourages healthy, vegetarian eating habits, as well as more active lifestyles are desirable. Nick Stanphone, the CEO of a responsibility driven product design company Shift and a specialist of behavioural change has explored new methods in behaviour change in his 2011 research paper, called The Incidental Effect. The paper explores the limitations of communications to foster new behaviours and draws on the work of social psychologists and behavioural economists to do that, as well as examples from social marketing. He’s main claim is that the history of public campaigning is littered with examples of collateral outcomes that are counter-productive to the initial intentions.¹

We all have come across this phenomenon; campaigns against smoking, gay-marriage or vegetarianism that have been addressed to us in such a patronising or irritating way, that it has caused us only to divorce the church, eat a steak and grab a cigar. This is called a counter reaction. In addition to these unintended consequences, social communication has often been stepped upon by bigger, bolder and sexier capitalist messages brought to us by big brands and corporations, making the good intentions go rack and ruined in today’s constant information overload. If nine billboards out of ten tell people to “wash down a burger with another burger”, and the last one tries to encourage you to eat healthy, then not only is it easy to ignore the tenth, but it is also more likely to resent and reject the proposed idea. This phenomena is what Stanphone calls the credibility crisis of constructive behavior.²

Indeed, one could argue that aggressive evangelism is out of date as a communications tool for socially responsible campaigns. When trying to affect people’s behaviour or consumption choices towards a more responsible and climate friendly direction, counter-productive collateral often occurs because of the methods used. In the worst case, the campaigns have the potential to do more harm than good. A Defra survey conducted in 2009 in the UK found that 1 in 4 adults regard even the simplest green behaviours, such as recycling, part of

¹ Stanphone 2011
² ibid p.10
an “alternative lifestyle”. A big segment of active rejection that sits alongside an even bigger segment of passive rejection. In Finland too these kinds of biases have lived long. Vegetarianism and other “green aspirations” have long suffered from a so-called hippie stigma. These attitudes lie deep especially among the baby boomer generation. Eating meat, private car usage and annual trips to Thailand are seen as the advantages obtained. The younger generation has responded to the socio-cultural regime and the information overload with mixed messages with endless irony and decadence, justifying it’s babylonian behaviour with the hashtag “yolo” (you only live once) and slogans like “go before it’s too late”.

In a way, this is understandable. I have been educating myself and reading literature about sustainability and climate issues for over seven years and I must say that I too am tired of the atmosphere of apocalypse. Environmental campaigns can be seen as classical bad examples from the field; Around fifty years of climate change messages behind us have only resulted in worryingly high levels of active disengagement and cynicism. Therefore it is a relief to hear Sanders and Stappers provide some alternative news as well:

“There is a growing realization that we can’t continue living the way we have been living because we simply don’t have the resources. The internet has helped us to see first-hand that the disruption of resources is not all equally distributed, making the need to conserve all the more important.”

In other words, at the same time there is growing knowledge and maybe even motivation to try to change. Could it be that the problem is not in fact the message but how it is delivered? Indeed, one might say that in the age of contemporary social communication, the man with the megaphone has proven not to be the best solution. Research has shown that behaviour change communications face inherent challenges, which however, can be reduced or totally avoided. Sometimes, it might best to say nothing at all.

According to Stanphone’s initial analysis of social marketing (across a wide range of behavioural issues), the most common pitfall of social campaigns is that they look in the wrong place for the real potential to shift mass behaviour positively; Instead of the top layers of communications the catalyst for behaviour change should rather be integrated within the inci-

3 ibid. 2011
4 ibid. 2011
5 2012 p.8
6. Incidental Effects

“From behavioural economics, we see that individual behaviours can often be shifted more effectively with subconscious prompts and nudges and that the most powerful sources of these influences are social”

– Nick Stanhope

When thinking about good examples of social communication and responsible brands, they all have one thing in common: they are not preachy. The positive effect of the products and services are incidental. They tend to act in a way that the green values are inbuilt in their core and so obvious, that they find it unnecessary to underline that they are on a mission. And if such a need rises, and they do emphasize lets say, their environmental effects, they do it in a positive manner. A couple of examples could be found in the following: Skype, Method cleaning products or the KeepCup.

Skype was not created with an environmental mission in mind, but it has ended up playing a hugely positive role in affecting environmental behaviours. It was developed and marketed as a communications tool that would generate substantial profits and it has clearly done that. In addition to that however, Skype has proved to be a powerful environmental product; Along with other video conferencing tools, it offers a viable alternative to business travel, a trend that has accelerated in the recent economic recession. The product also contains other positive incidental effects – it increases communication across families and friends, simply
and cheaply; it has allowed community organisations, social entrepreneurs and start-ups, with none of the original travel budgets to cut, and enable people to share ideas and collaborate in new ways. If any environmental campaign had had this kind of reported impact on behaviours, we would have heard all about it. However, in Skype’s 5,400 word Wikipedia entry, the words “environment” or “carbon” are not used once, points Stanhope.

Method cleaning products serve as an classic example of an environmental product with successful branding. The San Francisco based corporation is a pioneer of household products, producing nontoxic, biodegradable natural cleaning supplies with a focus on minimalist product design. In other words, they have got consumers to buy green cleaning products by marrying high-end design with environmental science. Eric Ryan, Co-Founder of Method says his idea was to bring a spa aesthetic into a formerly drab, industrial market.

“While some customers were certainly attracted by the idea of nontoxic, environmentally friendly cleaning products, most people just wanted soaps and sprays that didn’t stink and that looked nice on the countertop.”

Once again, the benefits of the product were incidental. According to Stanhope, behaviours within a successful product are also sustainable and transferable. One of the main risks of traditional campaigning is that the content of the messages becomes “infected” by the campaign vehicle or its methods. However, when new behaviours become incidental to a product experience that is useful, enjoyable and credible, the popular associations with those behaviours change. These new associations have the potential to be transferred onto similar behaviours.

Companies often fail to realise the potential of their core business activity to affect their consumers behaviour in relation to social issues, rather than just commercially. Instead, there is a tendency to create a separate silo of CR programmes, which offer easy PR opportunities but only an ounce of the potential social outcomes. Business has the tools of mass behaviour change at its disposal and we intend for our approach to help unlock that.

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7 ibid p.5
8 White 2011
9 2011 p.6
10 ibid.
Lessons From Sociology & Social Psychology

Stanhope’s study reveals that although old habits cling to life, the limits of a purely rational, information-based approach has been articulated well and often over the last few years. Pioneering work of social psychologists\(^{11}\), and recent books like *Predictably Irrational*, *The Tipping Point*, *The Paradox of Choice* and *The Power of Habits* have popularised a way of explaining human behaviour that has been an instinctive part of consumer marketing for fifty years: Our decisions are affected more often and more profoundly by subconscious, emotional influences than by conscious, rational forces.\(^{12}\) Also “Nudging” a concept by Richard Thaler suggests that positive reinforcement and indirect suggestions to try to achieve non-forced compliance can influence the motives, incentives and decision making of groups and individuals effectively, and sometimes even more effectively than direct instruction, legislation, or enforcement.

“A nudge, is any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people’s behavior in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives. To count as a mere nudge, the intervention must be easy and cheap to avoid. Nudges are not mandates. Putting fruit at eye level counts as a nudge. Banning junk food does not.”\(^{13}\)

Even though nudging has also gained some criticism about its risks and limits as “liberal paternalism”, it can still be seen as a powerful behaviour changing tool, especially when combined to other inducements.

Another finding from Stanhope’s study is that high levels of social capital in communities correlate strongly with the capacity of that community to mitigate negative personal and communal outcomes and propagate positive ones. According to him, the work of sociologists indicate that the most progressive communal behaviours are most pervasive in communities, where constructive and progressive social norms are reinforced. Therefore, within a process that helps people create or exploit incidental outcomes, there is a combination of short-term and long-term outcomes, measured by immediate changes in behaviours and sustained growth in social capital.\(^{14}\)

11 See Tversky, Kahneman, Libet
12 2011 p.8
13 Wikipedia, 2015
14 *ibid.*
Reflecting on these lessons, it can be interpreted that weather individual behaviours are often shifted more effectively with subconscious prompts and nudges and that the most powerful sources of these influences are social, then the idea of implementing nudges and visual cues in people’s private conversations might have some relevance. When looking at the OTT Messaging environments, it is clear that brands have already understood and seen the lucrative potential in these new communication environments. Advertisers are interested in stickers because they are able to invade into people’s private conversations\(^ {15}\) and therefore influence people’s consumption choices from the inside, so to say. The environment seems apt, knowing that Millennials value authenticity and the choices of their peers over authority. In other words, the daily conversations are exactly the place to influence people around us. To date, stickers have been used in Asia to promote new films, music albums, drinks, airlines and more. My question was; Why not deploy them to promote something that actually is good for people?

**THE TIPPING POINT THEORY**

It often feels like a mystery why some things – fashion trends, music, food – become a hit overnight. Malcolm Gladwell, has studied the how’s and why’s of this phenomenon in his book *The Tipping Point – How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. The main proposition of the book is that the best way to understand the emergence of trends is to think of them as epidemics. This goes for any mysterious phenomenon to a number of the mysterious changes that mark everyday life, from how unknown books turn into best sellers, the rise of teenage smoking, word of mouth, or any ideas, products, messages and behaviors that spread just like viruses do.\(^ {16}\) An epidemic has three characteristics to it; First of all, they are clear examples of contagious behaviour. Secondly, there’s an understanding that little changes can cause big effects. And finally, these changes happen in a hurry.\(^ {17}\) Reflecting on my discovery of sticker culture, it happened exactly the way Gladwell describes the process of contagion.

During my exchange studies in Seoul in spring 2014, I observed people in use their Samsungs and iPhones in the subways, café’s, restaurants and other urban locations. A new immersive and pervasive mobile culture caught my eye, as I found people sending small, funny icons to each other. Yes,

\(^{15}\) Russel 2013

\(^{16}\) 2000 p.7

\(^{17}\) 2000 p.8
they were texting, but in a totally new, richer way than what I had been used to in Finland. Even though at first I didn’t give them much attention, thinking they were rather irritating and childish visual gimmicks, somehow they grew into me. Not maybe over night, but definitely over a week. I found that spicing up comments in social media and my text messages was intriguing and entertaining. Also the fact that the whole nation of South-Korea was seeming to use them, had a huge effect. The behaviour was, indeed contagious. Reflecting on the fact that even incremental changes may cause big effects, a conversation I had with a friend the other day might be worth mentioning. She had also been doing her exchange in Korea and was therefore familiar with KakaoTalk and it’s range of stickers. She had had a long day and she would have wanted to send a sticker of an exhausted dog figure to her boyfriend to convey her state of mind at that time. However, they had had their conversation in What’s App, that didn’t have that option available, since the app doesn’t have inbuilt stickers. Frustrated, clearly as she was, we began talking about the subject further and very soon came into a conclusion that it’s exactly those little things that make you attached to certain products. Who would have thought, that having the option to send an image on an exhausted cartoon character would actually play a significant part in purchasing choices for mobile apps? Or even phones, if the certain apps that are dearest to you are not supported in them.

One could say that the tipping point of Emoji’s in Finland came in January 2015. On the same day I witnessed two significant mass-media brands deploy them: A McDonald’s outdoor campaign used Emoji as “visual copy” to advertise different...
products. Also, the national youth radio station YleX was having a conversation in their shoutbox about Emoji. These two cases showed that emoji culture had reached the critical mass among the popular culture. As for sticker usage the trend seems to be on the rise as well, but certainly still marginal compared to the use of Emoji. However, I predict that since these two phenomenas support each other, it is only a matter of time that chat stickers will reach the tipping point too.

**THE STICKINESS FACTOR**

The second rule involved in the tipping point of epidemics is related to the quality of the content itself; *The Stickiness Factor* means the ability of the message to be memorable and pushing people to act. Messengers are what make something spread. But the content of the message matters too. And the specific quality that a message needs to be successful is the quality of “stickiness.”18 Is the message — or the food, or the movie, or the product memorable? Is it so memorable, in fact, that it can create change, that it can spur someone to action? Gladwell argues that there are simple ways of making a message sticky, for example by including personal or practical factors in the message. Once again, it is not necessarily the content itself, but the way it is packaged what influences stickiness.19 Stickiness sounds as if it should be straightforward. When most of us want to make sure what we say is remembered, we speak with emphasis. We talk loudly, and we repeat what we have to say over and over again.20 People doing social communication campaigns and marketers have thought the same way.

There is a saying in the advertising business that an advertisement has to be seen at least six times before anyone will remember it. According to Gladwell, that’s a useful lesson for Coca-Cola or Nike, who have hundreds of millions of dollars to spend on marketing and can afford to saturate all forms of media with their message21, but in the context of social communication that exactly was considered as a pitfall. Gladwell suggests to draw inspiration from the area of direct marketing. In the advertising world, direct marketers are the real students of stickiness, and some of the most intriguing conclusions about how to reach consumers can be found in their work.22

18 2000 p. 92
19 2000 p.132
20 ibid. p.92
21 ibid.
22 ibid. p.93
THE POWER OF CONTEXT

The third factor that is crucial to the tendency of creating an epidemic, is the context in which the action takes place. Human behaviour is strongly influenced by the environment, both physical and intended as a community. Indeed, groups play a critical role in social epidemics. Within a community people are “susceptible to peer pressure and social norms and other kinds of influence that can play a critical role in sweeping us up in the beginnings of an epidemic.” In a way, this is an obvious observation. Communities nurture beliefs and create the context there to put them into action. Humans operate better within their empathy circle, where it’s possible to share experiences and intimacy, building trust. Groups of this kind serve as “incubators for epidemics, contagious messages” which can gain an extraordinary momentum within this peculiar context. In other words, “if you want to bring about a fundamental change in people’s beliefs and behaviour, a change that would persist and serve as an example for others, you need to build a community around them, where these beliefs could be practiced, expressed and nurtured. This of course, is a familiar scenario thinking of any religious or cult like communities, but also foundations for any organisational change.

ENTERTAINMENT

One place to look for evidence of the success of creative approaches of incidental effects is in entertainment. In entertainment, positive behavioural prompts have the opportunity to work their magic from within the narrative in an effective way. As an example, I’ll take Disney’s WALL-E movie from 2008. The movie is a computer-animated comedy science fiction film produced by Pixar Animation Studios. In addition for being listed as one of the movies of the decade by TIME magazine, the film is also seen as a critique on larger societal issues. It addresses consumerism, corporatism, nostalgia, environmental problems, waste management, the immense impact humans have on Earth, and risks to human civilization. For me, as well as for Murray & Heumann, WALL-E presents the most powerful environmental statement made by either Disney or

23 Passera 2011 p.69
24 2000 p.171
25 ibid. p.173
26 ibid. p.182
27 2000 p.173
28 Murray & Heumann 2009
Pixar studios: In the movie humankind remains only because it is artificially sustained and separate from the natural world, ruined and then rejected until a robot named WALL-E intervenes. Compared to other recent Disney animated films and dystopic science fiction movies of the 20th Century, WALL-E draws on nostalgia to strengthen its argument that not only has humanity destroyed earth, but that humans — with the help of the robot left to clean up the mess — can and should restore it to its more natural previous state.

Blockbuster movies rarely judge nor test its audiences, rather just entertains them and, from within this entertainment, can basic messages about societal issues and climate change get through to people. Entertainment has a vital role in exposing us with constructive examples of everyday behaviors.

“If half of every effort to integrate a product into entertainment was made to integrate a positive, everyday behaviour, people, and children in particular, would be walking out of cinemas and getting off sofas with more positive behavioural standards and norms, rather than just a latent appetite for more Cheese Strings and an Audi test drive,” says Stanhope. I couldn’t agree more.

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29 ibid. 2009
30 2011 p.14
The conceptual framework of my design work embraces two rather different disciplines: Food and communication. Knowledge gained from the areas of contemporary communication, behavioral and social sciences as well as social communication will now be deployed in a self initiated design challenge, tackling the wicked problem of unhealthy lifestyles and daily diets.

Before going into the actual sticker design process, I will offer a few words about the broader context of this design work. First I will discuss the changing role of a graphic designer in our evolving world, with thoughts on sustainability and design activism. Later I will present the design problem in hand and an approach to solve it. Chapters 7 will open up the design process of Veggie Friends and in chapter 9 will dive more deeply into the world of food characters in particular. In the last chapter I will provide some practical guidelines for future sticker designers.
Fig 29
Sketching Veggie Friends in Seoul during May 2014.
7. Starting Points For Design Work

“Pass it on as a philosophy. And for me it’s quite romantic, but it’s about if one person teaches three people how to cook something, and they teach three of their mates, that only has to repeat itself 25 times, and that’s the whole population of America. Romantic, yes, but most importantly, it’s about trying to get people to realize that every one of your individual efforts makes a difference.”

– Jamie Oliver in his 2010 TED Prize award speech, February 2010

The Role Of A Graphic Designer

The occupation of a graphic designer has changed a lot during the past couple of decades. A profession, that once was a physical craft has shifted towards intellectual problem solving. The range of the graphic industry has expanded dramatically during the recent years. In today’s world, graphic design is rarely restricted to its former actions of compositing, type setting and illustration. In the current media landscape where mobile is often considered as the new print and video as the new photograph, the role of a graphic designer can be seen as a creator of visual narratives. Along the way graphic design has also moved from books and magazines to more ambiguous fields such as strategic, service and concept design, alongside with new digital disciplines, such as web design, user experience and applications. Hence, the focus of design has moved from the tangible to more abstract matters. Today graphic designers often work as consultants, helping clients to envision new possibilities in areas like brand development. They design user interfaces and craft communications resonating with their target audiences, in addition to traditional visual work. Indeed, the field of graphic design has increased, and so has it’s power in our ocularcentric society.
Brian Dougherty bundles up the pragmatics of the profession in his 2008 book *Green Graphic Design*. He divides the role of a graphic designer to three different categories: First, Designer as manipulator of stuff, secondly, Designer as message maker and thirdly, Designer as agent of change. By manipulators of stuff Dougherty means the intentional use of words and images to create signified materials.\(^1\) As message makers designers build brands and promote causes with impacts far beyond common understanding. Moreover, here lays opportunity for designers to craft and deliver messages that have either have positive or negative impact on the world.\(^2\) In a way graphic design is always manipulative: It is in the core of our profession to help clients change the way people think and/or the way they act by persuading them with different techniques. This said, the designer can almost always be seen as an agent of change. A responsible, ethical and sustainable designer aims at powering positive change with their creative work.

The design task in this thesis was self-initiated and explorative in nature. Therefore it differs a lot from usual settings, where a brief is given from an external client. Instead of only having control of layout and visual elements of the message to be communicated, I moreover perform as an author, or as Ellen Lupton phrases it, as a producer.

> "Behind this phrase is the will to help designers to initiate content, to work in an entrepreneurial way rather than simply reacting to problems and tasks placed before them by clients." (1998)

In addition to other contemporary manifestations of graphic design, this creative project can be seen as an example of concept design. A concept, in the most common sense is an idea, a thought. In design practice this often means creative work that focuses on a big picture, a wireframe, or an overall idea of a service or a product. Industrial designer Jukka Itälä defines concept design as creative work that does not directly aim at delivery for production, or to a market launch. It is ambiguous and flexible by nature. The scope of concept design can vary from pragmatic, short-term product development to highly visionary scenarios of the future with longer life frames. The approaches may be broad, sprouting from vision creation and

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1 p.10
2 Ibid. p.12
strategic direction to scenario creation and trend analysis.\textsuperscript{3} The creative part of this thesis springs from trend analysis, which was used to form the core of the brand. My emphasis is not on creating a thorough marketing strategy for the brand, but rather on examining the illustrated characters as a possibility for meaning making and raising awareness. That said the final product can be seen as a 21st Century social communication campaign that involves elements of brand design.

Reflecting on Dougherty’s roles of the graphic designer, I aim to fulfill them all. As manipulator of stuff, my aim is to take the seemingly innocent chat sticker and turn it from a tool of self-expression into a tool of positive change. Secondly, as a message maker I try to raise awareness about food, health and sustainability issues. I have chosen Instant Messaging as a media, due to its credentials in generating and sharing information and because it is the environment where I can best reach my target audience. Thirdly I think myself as an agent of change; the project can be seen as part of digital activism in the words lightest sense.

**ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY AND WICKED PROBLEMS**

Sustainability has become a critical issue for designers and the society as a whole. When thinking about green graphic design, thoughts commonly tend to revolve around printing on recycled papers with toxic free inks or other issues related to physical materials.\textsuperscript{4} But in the post-digital and resource scarce world, we need to look beyond that. As Tatu Marttila declares in a lecture in Aalto University:

> “Transformation towards sustainability is urgently needed but this calls for not only new ways of production and planning, but also new ways of meaning making. Design activity can be of help in mediating the meanings for mere sustainable existence.”\textsuperscript{5}

In our time most of the problems designers face, can be called as wicked problems. Horst Rittel defined the term in the 1960’s as

> “a class of social system problems which are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications of the whole system are thoroughly confusing.” \textsuperscript{6}

According to Wahl and Baxter, problems are real-world problems that acknowledge the complex interdependence

\textsuperscript{3} Itälä 2014  
\textsuperscript{4} Dougherty 2008  
\textsuperscript{5} Marttila 2014  
\textsuperscript{6} Wahl & Baxter 2008
of diverse factors and stakeholders, rather than simplistic, linear cause and effect abstractions that isolate the product of design from its context. The area of food and nutrition is no doubt one of such problems: Poverty is linked with education, nutrition with poverty, the economy with nutrition, and so on. Yet these problems (poverty, sustainability, equality, health and wellness) are the ones that touch each and every one of us. Also, these problems can be mitigated through the process of design. Design work in this thesis can be seen as my humble attempt to take part in that mitigation process. Although I am fully aware that this project is only a needle in the hay, and that alone it is not capable of solving the wicked problem of unsustainable lifestyles and daily diets, I do believe every bit of effort is needed. In the words of Saku Tuominen: "No one can do everything, but anyone can do anything." 

**DIGITAL ACTIVISM**

Digital activism, or Internet activism, is action where digital tools, such as the internet, mobile phones or social media are used to bring about social and/or political change. The widespread and penetration of social media platforms has helped digital activism to the point where entire campaigns can now be run online without any or only a little offline components. Social media is a great way to both generate and share information, especially when traditional ways of offline campaigning run short due to different restrictions: geography, language barriers, resources, or in worst case, censoring. According to the online activism think tank, Meta-Activism Project, digital activism can be seen as action that has six key functions ranging from public opinion shaping, action planning and taking to resource transferring and protecting activists. Information transmission in the social media has proved to be powerful: It has the ability to make people create a collective identity. In the Internet age, the concept of user-generated content is different from past modes of mass media, as it lets anyone with a web connection to start a blog, or anyone with a smartphone to record and upload a video of anything to the digital media sphere. With the means of digital activism people have the
possibility to act as citizen journalists, educators and raise awareness by curating and re-broadcasting news stories to their friends using whatever apt social media platform. In short, digital activism has more potential to turn a conversation into civil action in contrast to passive moaning in front of a TV screen. This is why I chose my social communication project also to deploy social media and instant messaging in particular.
8. Food & Culture

The Problem – A Globesity Epidemic.

Globalization has been a force both for good and bad, especially when it comes to food consumption. Sadly, people all around the world, children in particular, are being ill because of the food they are eating and the unsustainable lifestyles they are pursuing. The “Standard American Diet” filled with junk food that has spread around the world like a disease is much to blame for the situation. At the same time there has been a huge decline in physical activity rates. Also, the digital landscape that we live in and the ever increasing sedentary time has its effects to the problem. Snacking increases while watching TV or movies, and late-night screen time may interfere with getting adequate amounts of sleep, which is a known risk factor for obesity. These factors together with bombarding food marketing strategies promoting poor diets have caused a so called globesity epidemic that is claimed to be the biggest and most serious public health challenges of the 21st century; Overweight and obese children typically grow into overweight and obese adults, who are susceptible to chronic complaints such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, placing considerable burdens on national health systems and economies. It can be argued, therefore, that policy which encourages healthy, vegetarian eating habits, as well as more active lifestyles are desirable, especially among children and young people.

It is also become widely understood that cattle are responsible for more than 18% of all greenhouse gas emissions, (much larger than all transportation worldwide: cars, buses, trains and

1 Oliver 2010
2 Anttila 2013
3 American Academy of Pediatrics 2011
4 Jolly 2011
5 Jolly 2011
airplanes) making it a significant factor of climate change.\(^6\) Hence, one would think that governments all over the world, Finland included, would be urging the folk towards vegetable eating. But during the past couple of years, the most visible food campaigns in Finland have actually promoted meat.\(^7\) This has kept the citizens’ assumptions about meat eating falsified. According to Riikka Suominen, a survey conducted in 2013 reveals that nearly 90 percent of Finns did not see their dietary choices affecting the climate, whereas in reality, 40 percent of the environmental impact comes from their food consumption.\(^8\) One must ask; How is this possible in a country, where education is considered to have such high standards and the media fairly less corrupted than elsewhere in the world? Why are there so little campaigns promoting vegetarianism?

One answer can be found from the European Union (EU) subsidies; Vegetable campaigns remain little, because they don’t get marketing aid from the EU: “Instead of food politics, the union pursues agriculture politics.” says Sipra Pietikäinen in Huili Magazine.\(^9\) This means that because meat products get aids, they also get the advertisement spaces. The Finnish association for promoting vegetables, Kotimaiset kasvikset ry web page looks outdated. Jyrki Jalkanen reveals that the NGO has received some funding addressed to upgrading of the functionalities in the site. However, new content is not going to be released.\(^10\) In 2015 I contacted the organization to talk about possible co-operation regarding this thesis, but got no response from their end. In 2013–2014 I also worked with an organization called Vihreä Pöytä (The Green Table) in order to design an online food media. The initial concept was to create a platform that would serve as a hybrid of a food magazine, a blog portal, a lifestyle publication and a recipe book. However, this plan foundered later in 2014 due to budget scarcity.

Indeed, it seems that initiatives promoting vegetable consumption and healthy eating lay in the arms of independent active citizens. As a silver lining to Finnish vegetarian culture (that mostly seems to blossom in the capital area) it is notable to mention a growing amount of blogs, and grass-root initiatives supporting this cause: Campaigns such as “Lihaton Lokakuu” (Meatless November) and “Vegaani Haaste” (a national challenge to go vegan for one month in January) Have received

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\(^{6}\) Lee 2012  
^{7} Suominen 2014  
^{8} Ibid. 2014  
^{9} Suominen 2014  
^{10} Ibid. 2004
media attention during the last years. The two campaigns can also be considered as good examples of digital (food) activism, as they both received a huge stimulus from social media exposure and active Facebook groups.

UNHEALTHY CULTURES

With all the variety provided by today’s supermarkets and all the nutrition information available, one could think that it would be an easy task for citizens from Finland to South Korea to eat healthy. An average grocery store provides an astonishing array of 47,000 articles of different food products to cover all kinds of individual diets. Yet, as cited by the Harvard School of Public Health (2015), urban food and built environments, as well as the new technologies accompanying city living, can lead to poorer diets and more sedentary lifestyles compared to those of previous generations. According to Stanhope the problem is that despite all the available information of healthy alternatives in the market, people are not making the right choices in their lives. He points out that even though the amount of individual consumption choices has increased, the traditional campaigner’s idea of choice does not really exist:

“The underlying forces in mainstream culture are lined up to make everyday life unhealthy.”

As the choice is ultimately left for the individual, it therefore leaves a question hanging in the air: How could better food and lifestyle choices be inspired?

The choices individuals make around food determine which nutrients are consumed. However consumers do not choose their foods exclusively for the nutrients they provide. Eating behaviour is complex and an understanding of the impact of the factors that affect food choice is vital. Culture shapes food behaviour and choices, as does the physical surroundings and circumstances one lives in too. Also peer influence has a major role in kids’ and young people’s consumption choices. And again, the peers are affected by the surroundings they spend time in, as well as celebrity endorsements they see.

11 Stanhope 2011 p.17
12 ibid. p.17
13 J. Pollard et al. 2002
14 Lang, Barling & Caraher 2009
All major scientific and medical institutions in the world agree that the risk of lifestyle diseases are greatly reduced by adopting a healthy low-fat, high-fiber diet. This result is best achieved by adopting a healthy vegetarian diet consisting of organic produce and natural foods with a proper amount of physical exercise at an individual level. Yet, the availability of unhealthy food is usually accompanied by the food industry’s bombarding advertisements and the lack of healthy options in people’s often hectic daily environment. Majority of these advertisements is targeted directly to children and teenagers, since they represent a vast market opportunity for food companies. Children’s exposure to television food advertising has been documented extensively in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and across Europe. Results show that an in the United States an average child sees 15 food advertisements every day, and nearly 5500 messages every year. Although majority of marketing budgets is spent on television advertising, food advertisers also promote their products extensively in other venues where young people spend a large amount of time, notably schools and the Internet. Based on my previous research on branded stickers I can assume that it is only a matter of time before we will start to see Ronald McDonald or Tony the Tiger in our daily chats. Multiple scholars have witnessed that these messages have a causal and direct effect on children’s food preferences, knowledge and behavior.

Today, there is a lot of scientific research done about how food affects not only our health but also people’s mood. A heightened awareness of the importance of sustainability, raw foods, and healthy lifestyles will be prevalent as we pay more attention to the environmental impact we have on our world. As people start to have a more holistic attitude towards life, respect towards its origin and quality of food became more important features. Food will not only be judged by it by it’s prize, amount of calories or the latest advertisements. With the philosophy of thinking about food as our medicine, it is possible to set our gaze to a more sustainable, green future.
9. Design Development

“As Tatu Marttila claimed in a lecture on Designing for Sustainability in Aalto University in 2014, transformation towards sustainability and wellness is urgently needed. These actions call for not only new ways of production and planning, but also new ways of meaning making. The aim of this thesis project was to create a concept that tries to answer to this need in a positive manner: Inspired of the new visual mobile culture and healthy lifestyles, I wanted to create a sustainable character brand that would communicate the values of New Optimism; a conscious, yet positive and lively lifestyle and inspire young people to pursue better diets. Reflecting on lessons learned from the areas of social psychology and sociology, as well as the current state of food industry, and its marketing strategies, it can be interpreted that individual behaviors are often shifted more effectively with subconscious prompts and nudges. Keeping in mind that the most powerful sources of these influences are social, this project can be seen in a light of a 21st Century social communication campaign. As a design brief my aim is to design illustrated characters that will predominantly

“Through visual and semantic language, a designer must create a design that assists the viewer not only in experiencing a particular emotion but also in truly understanding the content. This understanding is deeply culture specific and is not isolated in a single instance in time. The audience must actually realize the intentions of the designer and embrace the culture of the language that is presented. The designer does not design as language is spoken. Instead, design is a form of language: the linguistic quality of form and content is indicated through context and use. The poet selects a topic and paints a vivid understanding of scene through character, time, and the beauty of the language.”

—Kolko, 2011 p.14
function as an inspirational sticker set. These stickers will be used in instant messaging applications, in LINE in particular. At the moment (in spring 2015) LINE is the only application affording users to design and sell their own sticker designs in it’s sticker store via a service called the Creator’s Market. In addition to conveying emotions and personalizing interactions, the characters perform as ambassadors of sustainable, green lifestyles. I also aim at starting a blog, where the same themes will be discussed. To add substance to the characters, I shall start to publish one frame comics of them in the blog. Once ready the characters can be utilized to engage local food producers and grocery stores to promote fruits and vegetables in retail environment offline and online. However, this part requires further thinking and will not be stressed in this thesis. The design process is inspired of the Nick Stanhope’s Incidental Effect (see chapter 5) – an idea that products that are designed and marketed for a mass consumer audience can contain natural incentives for new behaviours. Next I will discuss more about the design process of Veggie Friends, the the ambassadors of New Optimistic lifestyles.

A Concept for Inspiring Daily Diets

Initially this thesis process started with a vague idea; I wanted to promote vegetarianism in some way. Questions of sustainable design and food had been twiddling in my head for years and I knew I wanted to somehow work with those topics. In the end of November 2014 I contacted a finnish NGO, Vihreä Pöytä after I had heard head of the organization, Christer Lindgren talking about their operation on Radio Helsinki. Vihreä Pöytä is an independent food project promoting creative finnish food culture and the supply of clean food in a sustainable manner. I asked if they were interested in co-operation, and if I could help them with their visual communication, thinking it would have made a good thesis project for me. Lindgren replied me with enthusiasm. We met a couple of times and based on our discussions I started to develop a media concept for Vihreä Pöytä during December 2014 and January 2015. The original idea was to design an online food media that would serve as something between a food magazine, a blog portal, a lifestyle publication and a recipe book. However, this plan foundered later in 2014 as I left to do my exchange studies to South-Korea.

1 See more at https://creator.line.me/en/
2 2011 p.6
In beginning of 2014 I left for Seoul to study in Hongik University’s graduate school IDAS. There I enrolled to a 15 week course called “Lifestyle Trends & Product Development”, thinking I could develop the online media concept further there. The course started with explorations of top 3 trends influencing and inspiring ones artistic or creative work in 2014-2015. The trends that I picked were Conviviality, Connect-
edness and Green&Clean. These trends were further developed into a philosophical and visual concept called "New Optimism", that was to form the core of my design brand. (Later Veggie Friends were developed reflecting to these design drivers.)

After a while in Seoul it turned out that it was rather difficult to try and design a magazine without any actual content or an editorial staff in the same country or continent with me. Lindgren had promised to deliver me some draft material and content so that I could do a mockup of the product, but for reasons unknown, I never received any. During this time I was happy to study trend setters and influential medias, who I saw as “lifestyle gurus” or influential persons leading healthy lifestyles, such as Gwyneth Paltrow with her Goop, and other bloggers as well as food and travel medias like Cereal Magazine. In the beginning of April 2014, Cathy Lee, my Korean professor, left me with two critical comments regarding my magazine project:

“As a design director in a magazine, what is yours?”
“You are a designer. I want you to design something that you can own.”

Mrs. Lee urged me to keep a food diary to document my own eating and tried to help me find my own voice as an influencer. She tried to get me to illustrate my culinary choices in a fashion illustration-like style or start a “food tip” video blogging channel of my own, but I had no interest in becoming Gwyneth Paltrow of “the healthy scandinavian diet” nor to build a personal brand around myself. I reacted with great opposition; I was terrified about the idea. I also hesitated on the thought of doing editorial illustrations about food. I felt very rusty as an illustrator and I was doubting the effectiveness of such approach. Professor Cathy Lee also encouraged me to dig deeper into the idea of New Optimism, one of the trend building blocks I had presented in the beginning of the course, and stressed further development with the concept.

At the same time I had discovered people using emoji in various different creative applications in the Internet and got excited about the way the Korean way of chatting with stickers in KakaoTalk. At the time I was also in a long distance relationship, using CMC all the time to communicate with my boyfriend. We had been ideating different themed Emojis and stickers for fun for some time, and it wasn’t long that I came up with the idea of designing New Optimistic stickers. I wanted to turn the so called New Optimistic philosophy into convivial pictures, portraying the lifestyle in a sticker pack. With these images I could try and influence people in an incidental manner.
My first idea was to design a series of icon-like illustrations, resembling Emoji but with more emphasis on the visual style. Pastel coloured vector illustrations with typographic affirmations was something I had in mind. At that time I wasn’t necessarily thinking of designing specific characters. The themes and motifs of the icons were to express New Optimistic activities and expressions; yoga practicing, meditation, cooking fresh food and other images from my cultural background like sauna and bicycling.

Vector illustration was a natural choice for me from the beginning. Among computer graphics there is a saying: "Everything that can be done as vector graphics, should be vector graphics." This enables the scaling of pictures to different sizes without having to worry about resolution limitations. Even though the final sticker file format is jpg, png or gif (if animated), it is easy to export the pictures to the desired file format at the end of the design process from Illustrator. This is also the type of illustration that I have most experience with.
After some first few sketches I did it turned out that the images were too vague to communicate what I wanted. The aspect of food did not come across enough. Portraying different dishes or food products alone didn’t feel right either— as an idea it felt dull and not communicative enough. Once again I was forced to face the question of characters, but was still hesitating; I didn’t consider myself as an character designer and felt very insecure, thinking I would only cause myself to be humiliated in the field.

Soon I started to think about the option anyways and was very soon led to a self-evident solution; incorporating the food element into the stickers as food characters. As mentioned earlier, looking into sticker shops of different applications as well as the image flow in google showed that majority of existing food characters and motifs were picturing junk food; pizzas, hamburgers, fries and sundays; the standard American diet with occasional Asian specialities and local delicatessens. This led me to study food characters more in depth.
**Mind Over Platter – About Food Characters**

Different kinds of food characters play a big role in the campaigns targeted to children and young people. The food industry has used illustrated characters and mascots in marketing purposes for decades. Unfortunately these characters are mainly used to advertise unhealthy food. On top of that, visual culture both in the East and West are full of burgers, fries, soda cans and ice creams. According to my research, junk food motifs are also visible in chat sticker packs. Pusheen the cat enjoys it’s hamburger meals, cup cakes and lolls afterwards in a pizza box. A Hamburger called Hamilton has his own sticker pack in Facebook. (see on left) Only a few occasional veggies can be found from the imagery of stickers. A welcome exception is “Naughty Foods” where bananas, avocados and apples adventure with the regular junk food figures.

**ANTHROPOMORPHISM**

Anthropomorphism, or personification, means the attribution of human form or characteristics to anything other than a human being, usually to animals, objects or nature elements. This approach is very common in the field of comic art and especially in the japanese kawaii culture, where food characters also have a long history dating as far as the ancient precedents in Japanese art.  

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1 Lombardi 2014
Nowadays, almost any food can be seen made into a character in the Japanese visual culture. It’s easy to make fruits and vegetables come to life by giving them faces and arms and legs. The Japanese stationery company San-X is known for various anthropomorphic characters (i.e. Amagurichan, a chestnut who’s impatient to be eaten; Mikan Bouya, a mikan; or Mamepyon, a family of peas) Also fusions between a food character and something else is common in the Japanese character scene. Food characters often go beyond a fruit or bread with a face and limbs, resulting in strange, unnatural chimeras combining food with other creatures.

Reflecting on this, it is perfectly normal that in 2014 Sanrio, the company behind Hello Kitty and other characters, held a contest for a new character, where all twenty of the candidates were some kind of food, or something combined with some kind of food. The winner of this contest was Kirimi-chan, a salmon fillet with an adorable face. Today she has been transformed into all kinds of merchandise.

In western comic art and character design tradition food is not that common of a motif. Yet animal characters are widespread. However, as mentioned before, mascots and illustrated characters have played a vital role in the history of western food promotion. Some of the most successful ones have developed over the years and gained lasting cultural significance. Most well known characters usually come from the U.S and are related to American brands. In the American tradition human-like characters and anthropomorphic animal mascots have ruled. Here animal figures are often portrayed standing on two feet or dressed up as humans. Notable is that looking at the historical timeline of mascots, it seems that characters not promoting sugar or animal fat are a rarity. A few that I was able to point out were the Jolly Green Giant and Mr. Peanut.

Inspired by a character from Grimm’s Fairy Tales, Jolly Green Giant was named after an oversized variety of pea and was hunched, scruffy, and a bit barbaric. However, Leo Burnett, quickly did a makeover of the character. The success of the rebranding was evident, since by 1950 the company had renamed themselves the Green Giant Company. Today Green Giant is commemorated by a 55-foot statue in Minnesota.

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2 Lombardi 2014
3 ibid. 2014
4 Bishop 2012 p.80
5 Jugular 2013
One of the most well-known food mascot in the western world is *Tony the Tiger* for Kellog’s Frosted Flakes. The character was a result of a mascot contest for Kellogg’s new Frosted Flakes cereals. Tony the Tiger won the public’s affection during the 1950s through radio and television campaigns that featured the friendly animated tiger chatting with real celebrities. With a very recognizable voice and catchphrase, the character was extended in the 1970s when he was given an Italian-American nationality and family.\(^6\)

From these examples it can be seen that the usage of characters for promotional purposes has a long tradition. Where’s the japanese kawaii characters are wildly imaginative and rely on cuteness as an intrinsic value, the western characters are more cartoon-like, fun and entertaining. Next I will return to the development of my own characters, the Veggie Friends and tell how I came up with the two characters, Babe the Banana and Yogi Carrot.
B is for Banana, Yoga is for Carrots

In order to find the most suitable veggies to represent New Optimism, I started studying different vegetables and fruits from the perspective of their mood boosting and empowering features. This exploration took me down the rabbit hole in the Internet, browsing through a large amount of articles and studies. However, coming to any specific conclusions was challenging, since as stated earlier, food and nutrition are considered as wicked problems and therefore a lot of contradictory researches and data is available. However, browsing through different veggies I was quickly led to a decision that I wanted to have one fruit and one vegetable character in my set. This way I could cover both salty and sweet aspects of food. Based on my intuition, I ended up sketching a vegetable classic, carrot and a personal favourite of mine, a banana. Luckily both of the food choices were supported by list of credentials regarding their health benefits.\(^7\)

Thanks to both of their slim and tall figures, the carrot and banana both quickly showed various possibilities in order to express actions. It was easy to transform the characters into different bodily expressions, compared to a broccoli figure I was sketching in the beginning of the process. Apart from the elastic banana and carrot, the broccoli was stiff and left only arms for expressive movement. I also liked the contradictions and contrasts I was able to build into the characters: The carrot is a yogi; representing a regular person who

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\(^7\) Medicalnewstoday.com 2015, Care2.com 2015
Fig. 39
Sketches of Yogi Carrot and Babe the Banana in Seoul, spring 2014.
Visual Inspiration

While developing the Veggie characters I gathered an extensive amount of inspiration material. Some of my sources of visual inspiration are presented here.

**ELLIE ANDREWS**

One of the biggest influences from the western contemporary illustration was London based graphic artist Ellie Andrews with her effective blend of hand drawings, geometric shapes, texture and pastel colours. Her colour palette is both nostalgic and contemporary at the same time.

![Ellie Andrews illustrations](Fig 40)

**KAWAII**

Kawaii style meaning cute and neat has been claimed to have taken precedence over the former Japanese aesthetics of “beautiful” and “refined”. As a cultural phenomenon, cuteness is increasingly accepted in Japan as a part of Japanese culture and national identity. Japanese people love cute things, and will buy mountains merchandise to show off in their homes, use as supplies, or hang them as keychains to dangle from their phones or bags. Today, kawaii elements can be found almost everywhere in Japan since it has become a prominent aspect of Japanese popular culture, entertainment, clothing, food, toys, and personal appearance. Especially prominent is the use of Kawaii characters that are used by many companies as mascots to present themselves to the public. The style of Kawaii influence in the context of sticker design is almost inevitable, since Japan and Korea are the places where sticker culture originates. Yet, I didn’t want the style to be a rip-off of Japanese style. Instead I wanted the pack to have its own

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1 Tofogu 2015
distinguishable look that would mix the asian and the western aesthetic features to a global citizen’s hybrid style and preference.

**NDA**

Purple gradient hair, glitter and holograms and cotton candy dreams. All perfectly nostalgic for a 80’s child as I am. To contrast the pastel tones neon colours are often added to the pallet. This “style” is often bundled up as New Digital Aesthetics. This soft wavy style embraces all things girly and cute with occcional quirkiness. Perfect colloection of visuals can be found in a blog called Crystal Asteroids. Even tough the materials of this style can’t always be linked to the idea of

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2 Shootofheroine.tumblr.com
Sustainability, I like the optimistic and joyful feeling that this style represents.

**MOTIVATIONAL POSTERS**

Nowadays social media seems to be full of motivational posters helping people live better lives. They usually deploy nicely drawn hand lettering. Many of these messages are something I felt relating well with the VeggieFriends brand. Later I used the characters as illustrations in motivational promotion posters for the brand.

![Aspiration posters found from Pinterest.com](image-url)
I chose my target audience to be a multicultural Millennial, familiar with the Emoji lexicon. Even though there are cultural differences and conventions in visualizing expressions between the East and West (and even that is a generalization), scholars from the social and biological sciences reveal that biologically hardwired and universal signals have been molded by the diverse social ideologies and practices of the cultural groups who use them for social communication. I see these different worlds merging in an interesting way in the sticker and Emoji world. For me, this mix is not only about different gestures and cultures of nationalities, but also about the various sub cultures that have their own specific cultural codes and ways of expression. For example, the American hip-hop culture (with it’s several genres) or Japanese anime incorporate a number of specific cultural codes that together in the ubiquitous world blend into a cocktail of codes, signs and expressions. This on the other hand creates new kind of visual culture with multiple intertextual and visual references.

In Veggie Friends – characters I use visual codes from both Eastern and Western cultures, trying not to go too deep into either end. However, I hope the expressions of the characters to be easily decoded for the Western user. The typographic affirmation “slogans” that I created are also set in english, narrowing the target group to people speaking and understanding this language. These decisions seemed apt considering the context of use. Line Messenger, even though originally from Japan, has already penetrated into Latin America and is looking for opportunities to break into the European and U.S markets as well, making the market of potential users bigger.

Trying to find a middle ground between the so called Eastern and Western visual style, I ended up trying multiple different styles of eyes for the characters. From the beginning I knew I wanted the characters to have very minimalistic eyes. I figured heavy gloss or shine effects weren’t suitable for the style since I wanted to keep the characters as simple as possible. Looking back this is something I would have done differently. In the next chapter I will discuss character design more deeply and tell about some specific things that is good to have in mind when designing stickers characters.

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3 Jacka, Garrod, Yub, Caldarac and Schyns 2012
4 Bea 2013
10. How To Design Sticker Characters?

Designing characters and mascots for different occasions and instances is all but a new concept. As reported earlier, there is a long history of using mascots and characters to gain recognition for brands. Already early mankind began leaving marks to signify ownership and to identify themselves with political and religious power. The Egyptians in the form of hieroglyphs and Roman Caesars commissioning artists to create sculptures in their own image. Nowadays these activities have been translated into commerce and business; talking tigers and witty rabbits have served as persuasive voices and faces for their respected brands from the dawn of capitalism. Interestingly, behind those seemingly innocent looking characters, there might be a whole team of people trying to identify and create the best possible “spokesperson” for a product or a service. Graphic designers, illustrators and artists alike paint, draw, sculpt and sketch to breathe life into characters that will become faces of companies and products. Thinking further, this is no wonder, considering that characters can play an important role in building brand loyalty from cereals to games and evidently, social media platforms.

Fig. 46
Trying out different expressions and eyes for Yogi Carrot.

1 Working Title Co. p. 5
2 ibid. p. 5
Good characters are distinguishable and lovable. They are something that people can identify with and infatuate with. Apart from food mascots, stickers resemble game characters a bit. However, a sticker character doesn’t need to be as thoroughly thought of: the functions of stickers are limited, whereas game characters might have multiple different aspects to them. Game characters might help the user to detach from the real world, but sticker characters perform in an almost opposite way: Since stickers are used to express feelings and reactions, they help the user to manage and form real life relationships and so actually attach to the real world.

In my opinion, the design process can be seen a bit similar to creating a character for a comic. A thing both games and comics have in common, is that in order to be successful, they need to have good characters. A good character is likeable, like a person that one can get attached to. In fact, according to Lankoski, who has written a dissertation about game characters, says that identifying with characters is based on the same cognitive mechanisms that are used when we interact with real people. He argues that mimicry and empathy are crucial in understanding characters, because the same neural mechanisms (mirror neurons) are activated in both cases. Several scholars argue that understanding of intentions, effects and actions of other people depend on imitation and empathy. Also other human features, like weaknesses are good to have in a character; just like in humans, the little “faults” in people often are the things that makes them lovable. There are some things that are important to keep in mind when designing sticker characters in particular. In the following section I have gathered some general guidelines to take into consideration when designing stickers.

**THE STORY**

Ijäs writes: “When starting to create a character it is important to think about it’s personality, history, a place in the community and how it reacts in different situations. A good character should also have a goal that it is pursuing.” Objectives can vary from something bold and epic like saving the world to more human goals related to i.e personal growth. The scale of the goal doesn’t need to be big; it can refer to one episode in the character’s life. In the next episode the target can be different or it can have multiple goals simultaneously.

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3 Juntunen 2013
4 2010 p.21
5 *ibid.* 2010
6 Ijäs 2013 p.64–66
7 *ibid.* 2013
In sticker design every image can be seen as a micro narrative. One way to approach character design would be to list keywords and goals for the character. i.e The facebook foxes are unisex, sympathetic, playful and elvish. Key words and inspiration can be drawn from various sources. For example movies, literature or music. For me music and music videos are a great source of inspiration. For example Beyoncé’s music video for the song Blow served as a visual inspiration for me in when starting to design Veggie Friends.

Sometimes characters need some thinking and planning before they start to live in the mind of the creator. Other times they just appear. The author might even think that the character writes itself without the artist having to force it to happen. Majority of characters usually live in peoples minds already before they start to be transformed into narratives. This can be said about Babe the Banana as well. In 2013 I created a banana figure for a poster illustration but soon it started to live it’s own life. I named the banana character Bebe. She is a helpless flirt but deep down a loyal banana, suffering from codependence. She loves to sleep and can’t get enough of cuddling. The banana was transformed into a couple naturally, when I drew two of them into a bunch. Bebe is a happy banana with a dramatic personality, her favourite hobby is baking banana bread to her loved ones and dancing. Yogi Carrot, on the other hand was born when I started to sketch it to a sticker character. In the beginning I did some experimentations with the greens of the carrot, eventually turning them to a gradient hair. Later I found that the hair worked well as a supportive visual element for expressions. In the case of the banana, the peels proved to work similarly as an element emphasizing bodily expressions. Yogi is a mellow character, enjoying inner peace through yoga and meditation and urban gardening.

SIMPLICITY

It is crucial to bear in mind that stickers are (very) small pictures. The size of a LINE sticker sticker is 370 x 320 pixels in maximum. Stickers are meant for effective and easy communication. Therefore the design should support this aim being as simple as possible. Working with considerably small illustrations that are supposed to be viewed on smartphone screens, it is important to take into consideration how the images are rendered and displayed in their native environment. If the characters are too detailed, they will be blurred and lost in the background of the application’s user interface. It also
important to consider the background colours of the intended interfaces one is designing for. For example, Facebook has a much more subtle background than LINE, which affects what kind of colors and strokes are possible to use. During the design process I first used the Imoji-application as a mockup and demo platform. This gave me an opportunity to view the images very close to their natural size and also check how they rendered on the device’s screen. Even more effective however was to send the images as jpg-files to my email and download them from my gmail account to my picture library and view them on on my iphone.

COLOR & STROKE

When creating your own sticker characters, color and line are probably the most important elements in use. Both elements are used to create coherence throughout the pack as well as to create a unique look of the sticker set. Looking at different applications and sticker stores, it can be seen that styles and techniques vary a lot, as do their ways of communicating values and ideas. Characters inside one pack should maintain visual coherence and be easily identified to the same graphic family and complement each other.

Browsing through sticker characters in LINE, KakaoTalk, and Facebook, I figured that both elements, colour and line play a notable part in the overall style of characters. Both KakaoFriends and LINE characters use bright, pure hues and strong black strokes with outlines to create maximum contrast to the characters. This ensures that they are both visible in their small size and stand out from the different coloured background themes. Facebook’s stickers on the other hand have more visual variety in their style; FB Foxes, First Mate, Super Tiny and the PRIDE packs are riding the “flat” design wave, using only solid color fields with no outline strokes at all. The colors in these packs are more subtle and use more softer tones. This is possible because Facebook’s Messenger’s user interface has a solid white background where even thin strokes remain visible. More expressive styles can be found too in all applications: In FB Sinister Oyster and Happy-Go-Lucky deploy gradients and a brush strokes, bringing more dimensionality and visual expression to the figures and Disney has 3D-illustrations of i.e Frozen-movie characters, but for me they do not feel as impactful.

In the design development of Veggie Friends, color and stroke played a big role too. I wanted to use bright, pastel colours with gradients to maintain the dreamy NDA look and feel.
The initial colour palette was inspired by the colors in Beyonce’s Blow video, as well as Kawaii aesthetics incorporating bright hues of pink, yellow, and lilac together with softer pastel gradients. However, this soon became a challenge. As a fan of the so-called flat style and design without strong outlines, I was tempted to not use outlines in the design of Veggie Friends at all. I also thought that this would distinguish Veggies Friends from their Asian counterparts. But as I viewed the stickers in mock-up pictures, the pastel colors and delicate details vanished into the strong color scheme and thick strokes deployed in the LINE user interface. It also turned out that without outlines, the characters lacked visual power and were not easily identifiable in the messaging environment. Viewing the characters on my iPhone’s image library let me examine the approximately correct size of the characters, but forgetting that the characters would not be viewed on a white background in practice. Finally, I made mockups in Photoshop and tried to nest the characters in all of the basic LINE themes. Trying to find the right type of outline, I went through multiple different options; from a hairline stroke to 3-point thickness with multiple color options. I learned that the choice of stroke easily affects the whole look and feel of the set. In the end, I was convinced that the strong black stroke was the best solution in order to maintain the effectiveness of the pictures and making them blend in nicely to the LINE chat view.

Fig. 52
At first, I wanted the design of the characters to be as soft as possible, with as little outline as possible, but after making mockups with Photoshop, I realized I had to make strong, black outline strokes to make the design of the characters pop out from the LINE messenger background.
SHOWCASING IDENTITY

The character’s identity and personality can be emphasized by drawing the character into interesting poses. Here specific gestures of a character can be emphasized. For example, when drawing a “thumb’s up”, the hand should be big and clear. One action or one expression can perform as a pursuit of the characters life. Therefore it is extremely important that the all the images in the pack clearly express and communicate intended emotions and actions. This can be best achieved by drawing a big head for the character, since with a large facial area emotions can be shown more clearly. The development of Veggie Friends was driven by experiments with expressions. As a starting point to figure how Veggie Friends acted, I listed the most common situations I used stickers as well as the pain points where I hoped there would be one. These situations included greetings, setting dates for coffee or lunch, and different kind of reactions, to name a few.

EXPRESSIONS

As cited before, designing Veggie Friends took me to study basic human emotions and the way they are visually expressed in different cultures. This was one of the most interesting parts of the design process and could easily be turned into a thesis of it’s own. Because of this, I try to cover the subject lightly. More
detailed analysis on the cultural differences of visual expressions can be found in Chapter 4.

For a long time it was commonly recognized that there are six basic internal emotional states: happy, surprise, fear, disgust, anger, and sad, all humans communicate using the same facial movements by virtue of their biological and evolutionary origins. However, in 2012 a group of scholars\textsuperscript{13} refuted this assumed universality and showed that whereas Westerners represent each of the six basic emotions with a distinct set of facial movements, Easterners represent emotional intensity with distinctive dynamic eye activity. The study showed that across cultures, expression of emotions happen using culture-specific facial signals. This once again proves why I have had troubles understanding some of the Korean and Japanese sticker expressions. Having decided that my target group would be people from different nationalities and even continents, I had to find some kind of middleground. To do this, I intentionally picked some graphic emblems from the western tradition, and some from Japanese visual language. For now, I can’t say weather that is a strength or a weakness in my pack.

Based on the chart of six basic human emotions, I draw an emotion map, where I listed all expressions that I felt apt to have in a sticker set. Obviously there are more than 40 different expressions that one might want to express at some point in some conversation, so I had to do some curating. Considering that I wanted to make an “optimistic” sticker set, I had

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{emotion_map.png}
\caption{A mind map of different emotions.}
\end{figure}
to think what kind of emotions are considered as “optimistic”, and was it apt to only portray positive feelings. According to Alex Goldmark’s opinion of stickers being limited in their range of expressions, I finally figured that I didn’t want to restrict the emotional range of my set to just positive emotions. That said the pack now includes expressions of exhaustion, being sick, sadness and shock. It also has a sticker for saying an emphatic “No” too.

**LINE CREATOR’S MARKET**

At the moment LINE is the only Over-the-Top Messaging application receiving and selling user created stickers. In the future it is interesting to see how other applications will react to this trend, and I am pretty sure Facebook will offer something similar soon. Some applications like Viber and Path have already held sticker contests, where users have been able to send their proposals for the next sticker characters to be. The registration and selling of stickers in LINE is free, the only requirement is registration for the account. The process of getting one’s stickers on sale is pretty straightforward: First, you register as a Creator by entering the necessary information to register yourself as a creator. Next, you Enter text information including the title and description of the stickers, and upload a total of 42 images, including 40 stickers, one main image, and one image for the chat room tab. After LINE has received your submission, they will review it against their sticker sales criteria. This might take a while, my process was pretty fast, taking approximately two weeks. If your stickers get approved, after the review, you can hit the release to start selling your stickers on LINE STORE immediately. Each sticker set will be priced at JPY 120. However, the currency in the LINE application is LINE coins. You can buy them in the sticker store. One pack usually costs 50 coins. The 50% of sticker revenue will be transferred to your registered bank account (excluding 30% fee from Apple, Google, etc.). You can register as a creator in the LINE App on your smart phone. If you do not have a LINE account yet, you need to download the App on your smart phone and create one.

![Fig.57 Line Creator's Market webpage.](image)
As said earlier, the biggest technical constraint in sticker design is the size of the images. The following information is from the LINE Creator’s Market sticker guidelines:

- The regular sticker template is W370 x H320 pixels.
- For a whole pack, you need to have a quantity of 40 individual images in a png format with a transparent background. These will be the images you will be used to communicate in chats.
- When designing your stickers, there should be a margin of around 10px between the trimmed image and the content around it.
- Please consider the balance of the stickers when creating your designs.\textsuperscript{14}
- In addition to the actual stickers, you will need a Main Image, that will be representing your pack in the LINE sticker store page. This image is W 240 x H240 in size and also in png format.
- You also need to design a Chat Room Tab Image, which will show in the sticker keyboard bar, indicating your pack. This image is a png file, size: W 96 × H 74 pixels.

\textbf{The Sticker designer’s check list}

1. The Sticker images will be resized automatically. Please ensure the image has an even-numbered height and width.
2. A resolution of 72dpi and above and RGB color mode are recommended.
3. The maximum file size for each image is 1MB.
4. Backgrounds should be transparent.
General guidelines for sticker designers have been listed in the LINE Creator’s Market as follows:

**Recommended:**
- Stickers that are easy to use in daily conversation and communication.
- Stickers that consist of easily understandable expressions, messages, and illustration.

**Non-recommended stickers:**
- Stickers that are difficult to use in daily conversation, such as objects and scenery.
- Stickers that are not illustrated pictures, such as photos.
- Stickers that have poor visibility, such as pictures that are too long or full-length illustrations of tall characters.
- Sets that significantly lack variety, such as stickers made up purely of pale colors or strings of numbers.
- Stickers that offend public order and morality, are suggestive of under-age drinking or smoking, contain sexual or violent imagery, or may fuel nationalism.

**Other Notes**
- Stickers for sale may not be used for advertising purposes. Please do not include any form of advertisement in the sticker images, titles, and text descriptions, such as the announcements of product release dates, or submit stickers featuring only corporate logos.
- Stickers that require users to provide their personal data or IDs for purchase are strictly prohibited.
- Stickers that mention any internet service, messenger app, or similar services, or consist of any characters related to such services may not be sold in the Creators Market.

For more details, please see the review guidelines for LINE Creators Market.
11. Final Products

**VeggieFriends Sticker Set**

Join the New Optimistic movement with Babe the Banana and Yogi Carrot. Ignite your chats with Veggie Friends, the ambassadors of healthy, green lifestyles.

The pack can be bought from here:

[http://line.me/S/sticker/1141960](http://line.me/S/sticker/1141960)
Fig. 55
Ready VeggieFriends
Sticker set, 40 images.
1
“Just Breathe”

3
“Torment”
2
“Zest”

4
“Chillaxing”
5
“Laughing Out Loud”

7
“Infatuation”
6
“Spooning Bananas”

8
“Burning eyes”
9
“Fresh From The Oven”

11
“Innocence”
10
“To Be Or Not To Be”

12
“Good Times”
13
“Never Stop Exploring”

15
“Annoyance”
14
“Harvest Time”

16
“Like”
17
“Sadness”

19
“Giggle”
18
“Urban Gardening”

20
“Shock”
21
“Blow A Kiss”

23
“Hello!”
22
“No!”

24
“Happy Together”
"Cooking"

"Hungry!"
29
“Cross Eyes Face”

31
“Exhaustion”
30
“Uneasiness”

32
“Vomiting Rainbows”
33
“On My Way”

35
“Nervous Anticipation”
34
“Loving Sprouts”

36
“Cheers”
37
“We Can Do It!”

39
“Good Bye!”
“Downward Facing Dog”

“Hopeful”
Onks Hakikesen toril toria tänään? Oisko torikahvit mitään?
Motivational Posters

I also designed a series of A1 sized posters promoting Veggie Friends.
These posters were exhibited in the SPRING—STEAM 2015 Footnote to a Graphic Design Programme in Design Forum Showroom 19.5. – 24.5. 2015
Fig. 56  
Veggie Friends exhibiting in Springs Steam exhibition 2015.
A Campaign Concept for Retail Environment
Offline Retail Environment

1 Go to supermarket.
> Go to the fresh fruit & vegetables-section

3 Be inspired of the characters that you see.
> Buy veggies

5 With a code in your receipt
you can download the Veggie Friends sticker set to your smartphone.

6 Eat your greens and start chatting
with your friends:)
A Campaign Concept for Retail Environment

*Online Retail Environment*

1. **Go to online supermarket**
   > Go to the fresh fruit & vegetables-section

2. **See the promotional banner**
   on the front page > Buy veggies

5. **With a code in your receipt**
   you can download the Veggie Friends sticker set to your smartphone

6. **Eat your greens and start chatting**
   with your friends.
12. Conclusions & Thoughts

When starting this thesis, I didn’t know much about stickers or the different applications in the field, leave alone their business models. Almost equally unfamiliar I was to character design. Now I can say I know something about these subjects. As in any project, If I would start the process now, I would do so many things differently and more efficiently. That I consider as a good thing, meaning I have learned something along the way. The fact that I had no previous experience and knowledge about sticker design can be considered as an advantage and a handicap. The good thing was I could dive into a completely new field and view it with fresh eyes. The path I chose forced me to win my fears and step to an area where I considered myself everything else than an expert. Along the way I have gained valuable knowledge about one of the biggest businesses in the world and found my inner child again, as I got to play around with food and illustration.

A downside was that the process was slow and took a lot of time and effort. Being a timely subject, there was not much academic literature available, nor did I know how these products were produced in practice. This meant a lot of applied research and design work in practice. One might say it was a learning by doing process. Another clear challenge was the broad themes of food and communication. As said already in the beginning, at times it was challenging to stay focused on the things that were relevant. Exploring cultural differences also brought an inevitable third dimension to this thesis, even tough I did not think that it would take such a big role, as it finally did. Yet, in order to understand stickers as artefacts of visual culture and products of meaning making thoroughly, I figured it was necessary explore them at least on the level I did. Naturally this part was influenced by my own experience with the subject and could have been given less attention.

I consider myself as a concept designer, rather than a character designer and I acknowledge that this also shows in my work. Someone who is specialized in game characters or comics would probably have approached the subject in a completely different way, stressing the details of the illustrations more. I, on the other hand was constantly more interested in thinking of the brand holistically, for example how to engage local supermarkets to advertise fresh fruits & vegetables with these characters.

The retail concept presented in the end was designed during my exchange period in Seoul and is therefore aimed at a Ko-
Rean e-market. After returning to Finland I was eager to find some local partner for this project. This attempt eventually dried out for two reasons. First was the problem that I had no certainty I would ever have a real product at the end. The second reason was that my first supervisor, Marjatta Itkonen advised me to contact some a NGO like Kotimaiset Kasvikset over a grocery store. I did, but apparently had bad timing since I never caught anyone and was only greeted with letters telling about organizational changes.

Reflecting on my research question "Can these stickers be used to influence food and lifestyle choices?", I can not give a definite answer at this point. As said, this thesis was written at a time, when I didn’t yet have a real product, which prevented me from doing proper user testing and data collecting. What I can say, based on my literature review, is that I do believe so, in theory. Now that the product is ready, it would be interesting to test it and interview people properly.

Lesson learned from chapters 5 and 6, shows that the tools and methods of advertising can definitely be used to promote better consumption choices. Products like KeepCup and Method cleaning products stand for great examples of clever branding that has made responsible products cool. However, here again, final change in consumption and behavior is left for the individual but at least I see these products as encouraging players in the field. Also packaging plays a big part in the market place. Today many healthy snacks and food products have been branded in a “hipster” style, making them stand out in the retail environment in a fresh and positive way. (i.e Innocent smoothies and FourSigma herb and mushroom products) These products, as well as VeggieFriends, in my opinion, can be seen as examples of a new ways of raising awareness. The tone of voice of these products are not preachy, rather just emphasising the positive aspects of the products.

As we learned from chapters 7 and 8, visual culture expresses values and attitudes and carries different meanings than text. In other words, what we see does affects what we want. As we spend more and more time in front of screens, it can be assumed, that the images we see in the digital landscape, may affect on our cravings, and therefore eating habits too. Since advertisers and brands are already invading the messaging platforms, it must prove, that there is some kind of potential in the combination of where and how the message is received. That said, I believe there must be a potential of chat stickers influencing food choices. However, since the research didn’t include a survey that would reveal data on this subject, the
final result remains a mystery. So far my biggest reward has been the moment my friend sent me the banana sticker in LINE for the first time. At the moment I don't know how many times the pack has been downloaded either. There is 2049 food themed stickers in LINE’s sticker store, meaning there is quite a lot of competition. Now that the brand is ready, I should probably start marketing them, in order to gain a relevant amount of users. Inspiration can be drawn from Pucheen the cat, and I think it could be a good idea to start a blog around the characters to gain more recognition for the characters. For now Emoji characters seem to be more widespread and popular worldwide than stickers, since the characters are usable over many different applications. Now that I know how these kinds of products are produced, I would have designed this product as an Emoji app. This would have probably gained me a considerably bigger market and more users. Just the other day I read about a Swedish social communication campaign that utilized Emoji to talk about child abuse.1 This can be seen as an advertisement that Emoji characters and stickers do have potential as tools for social communication.

If I had more time, I would have also wanted to animate the characters by making simple gif animations, but in order to graduate in time I had to give up on the thought. Even a small movement creates a big effect in the characters and I hope I will have the possibility to explore those possibilities with VeggieFriends or other stickers in the future.

Will Emoji and stickers slowly slur over written text? My answer is this: Signs, symbols, emoticons and stickers, in all their diversity, have penetrated and marked expressions of our time, pointing to the future by comprising and conserving something of the past. History has seen various attempts to develop sign languages, but in the end they often fail because they run out of symbols.2 On the other hand, as Adrian Früiger asked already in 1989: “How strangely clear it seems that the modern need for symbols closes a circle that takes us back to the rock paintings as the precursors of speech fixing, the first of all indications of human culture.” Stickers and Emoji characters are good for enhancing communication. Compared to words, images are easier to comprehend and quicker to understand, making them therefore a good way for fast, simple communication. Yet, I hardly doubt them taking over textual communication. Moreover, I see them as an integral part of the way we commu-

1 Logan 2015
2 From Otto Nurah to Bliss symbols and Icon Language by Jochen Gros
nicate today. They are used as accessories to enhance our style and reflect our moods and personality. No-one can surely say, what the future holds for emoji and stickers, but their future seems bright and it seems to me that their use resonates to generational behaviour.

I know my project had broad and idealistic intentions of changing the world for the better, and I am fully aware that the potential of real change through this product is probably quite small. However, I do think that it is vital that this voice exists in this landscape, and although I can’t really know if it ever gain even a little ground on the much more dominant forces that define our eating and living habits. If I can influence even one person to quit or reduce their junk food eating and thinking about their lifestyles in a more conscious way, I am happy. Even more happy I am if I hear someone stiff has begun to do yoga. If a carrot can do it, you can do it.
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