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DOES LMD.LK STACK UP?

Dr. Nicola Davies explains the principles of psychology in website design

Design in itself is a powerful tool. Used effectively, it can conjure strong emotions and behaviours; it can move us to tears or take our breath away. In fact, architects say that the design process is not the mere conceptualisation of geometric shapes, but the shaping of human experience.

Let's take a look at these age-old psychological principles of website design and apply them to LMD's online edition.

The use of psychology in website design is a growing field borne of increased competition. This is especially true with regard to the burgeoning e-commerce industry in Sri Lanka. Companies are now faced with the challenge of creating websites that stand out from others.

One of the ways to achieve this is through the use of emotional user interfaces to elicit positive emotions (a sense of security) from users which, in turn, foster a stronger connection with the brand.

Three levels of visual website design are highlighted in Donald Norman's book *Emotional Design: Why We Love (or Hate) Everyday Things* – viz. the visceral, behavioural and reflective levels.

The *visceral level* is the initial impact of the design on the user, with the goal being to call something positive to mind. On the LMD website, the formal geometric design calls to mind a sense of order and purpose.

This conveys a professional image, which will harness trust in its users. This trust is essential, since www.LMD.lk lays claim to being the Voice of Business – so users need to be able to trust this voice, since they are likely to want reliable business information.

What the website lacks, however, is a uniqueness that makes its visceral appeal more impressive and distinctive compared to other business websites.

At the *behavioural level* of visual design, function is emphasised. Effective behavioural design entails the use of features that encourage action, such as prominent prompts to purchase items. This relies on the designer's understanding of the needs of the users, vis-à-vis the product of the website.

LMD's website offers exceptional functionality, including a marquee on stock market prices and a slide show for feature articles, both of which prompt the user to learn more.

The clearly displayed banner that encourages users to 'subscribe to the LMD e-magazine' is another example of how the website utilises the psychological benefits of providing a call to action.

This is enhanced by the use of videos which have immense user appeal. Research suggests that as many as 60 percent of website visitors gravitate to videos, if they are available. People are also more engaged with services or products seen on video, which garners increased commitment. This is largely due to the psychological impact of videos.

People tend to connect emotionally with videos, especially those with people in them. This is why video viewing consumers are 85 percent more likely to buy a product. Furthermore, if your target audience comprises busy executives, as many LMD readers will be, saving them time with the use of video rather than text makes a good first impression. Fifty-nine percent of senior executives prefer to watch videos than read text.

But the LMD website walks a fine line between offering a high level of information and interactivity, versus

being overwhelming and confusing users. This could be particularly detrimental if it wants to attract users who are not business experts, but have an interest in business.

The *reflective level* of visual design relates to the entire website experience, which is where sites tend to stumble. Many websites are functional but lack an overall appeal that impresses a specific image on the mind of the user.

This reflective level is addressed to a certain extent on the LMD website. Its format and layout is reminiscent of a magazine, which allows for a much quicker and stronger association to be made between the site and the product. However, the constant movement on the home page can be a distraction which takes away from the experience of sitting down to read a magazine.

Colour also plays a key role in website psychology, with research suggesting that it can contribute or hinder the trust and satisfaction users derive from a website.

On the LMD website, there is a prominent use of red, which elicits a sense of energy and vitality, corresponding to the active role that the magazine seeks to play in the world of business.

Another strategy used by website designers to effectively harness the power of emotions in design is through the use of image psychology. Websites use image psychology by adding relevant images that will better bridge their message to the user. This facilitates brand understanding by offering an alternative to words to understand information.

LMD's website does this well through a selection of authoritative pictures, but it needs to be careful – too many authoritative pictures could prove too abstract and may obscure the key message of the website.



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