Towards a Definition of the Concept of "Non-Formally Trained Graphic Designers"

Mark Okyere

Design is omnipresent throughout society[1] and it is believed that everyone possesses the ability to design,[2] even if not everyone can become a competent or professional design practitioner.[3] At the same time, the concept of "non-designers" has been widely used since the 1980s, with design professionals, scholars, and other stakeholders employing a range of terms to refer thereto. For instance, it has been invoked in a wide variety of local contexts, such as regional conferences, in-house meetings, and local public meetings by both designers and those who are interested in becoming designers. Examples found in gray literature come from governmental departments and agencies, non-profit economic and trade organizations, academic and research institutes, libraries, museums and archives, businesses and corporations, and freelancers (i.e., bloggers, consultants, and web 2.0 enthusiasts). However, the concept of "non-designers" currently has no broadly accepted operational definition, despite the term's pervasiveness. In the present study, I seek to identify the reasons for this lack of consensus and examine what might be done as a first step towards reaching an agreement about the term's definition.

The line between designers and non-designers has become blurred as a result of the advent of computers and other technological devices. Companies like Adobe and Corel, among others, have developed image-editing and design software

---

1 John McWade: *Before & After: Things Every Designer Should Know* [Video file], published 27/02/2013, http://www.lynda.com/Design-Page-Layout-tutorials/Before-After-Things-Every-Designer-Should-Know/110285-2.html (retrieved 01/05/2016); Liesbeth Stam/Wouter Eggink: "Why Designers and Philosophers Should Meet in School," in: Erik Bohemia/Arthur Eger/Wouter Eggink/Ahmed Kovacevic/Brian Parkinson/Wessel Wits (eds.): *Design Education and Human Technology Relations*, Westbury: Design Society 2014, pp. 226–231.

2 Nigel Cross: "Designerly Ways of Knowing," in: id.: *Designerly Ways of Knowing*, London: Springer 2006, pp. 1–13.

3 Ezio Manzini: "Design in a Changing, Connected World," in: *Strategic Design Research Journal* 7 (2014) 2, pp. 95–99.

that can be used by individuals who lack a formal education in design.[4] McWade notes that design software's contemporary dissemination can potentially make anyone into a designer.[5] McWade's assertion is particularly relevant for the period 2013–2021, which saw the rise of "open design," in which designers operate from a small room that they find comfortable, whether it be their home, a studio, or some combination of both.[6]

The concept of "non-designers" (and related terms) found in previous studies bears a striking resemblance to what I call "non-formally trained graphic designers" (NFTGDs). However, while these earlier studies refer to "non-designers" in order to make a point within the context of their arguments, they fail to provide a working definition for the term. Zeegen, for instance, reports that "in the UK, only 41% of all designers hold a degree level qualification and as many as 350,000 people working in design consultancies are actually non-designers."[7] While he does not provide the reader with further details about what constitutes a non-designer, we can infer from the context that this expression refers to the 350,000 design-consultancy employees who lack a degree-level qualification. His readers presumably know what a non-designer is and, thus, do not require a definition of the concept. It is also possible that he refrained from providing a definition because he did not intend to transpose the concept of a non-designer outside of this context's parameters. Similarly imprecise uses of the term can be found in the works of scholars[8] and certain industry practitioners.[9] While there have been sporadic attempts to formulate some sort of definition, it can be said that, generally speaking, little effort has been invested in arriving at an in-depth definition of the term itself.

I have attempted to define the term "non-experts or non-professionals in the field of graphic design" in a previous study;[10] I found that about 82% of the design workforce in Asafo in Kumasi, Ghana (a town noted for its printing and design

---

4 Ellen Lupton/Jennifer Cole Phillips: *Graphic Design: The New Basics*, Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press 1995.

5 McWade: *Before & After.*

6 Bas van Abel/Lucas Evers/Roel Klaassen/Peter Troxler: *Open Design Now: Why Design Cannot Remain Exclusive*, Amsterdam: BIS 2011.

7 Lawrence Zeegen: "What Use is Design Education?" in: *Iridescent* 1 (2011) 2, pp. 48–51, here p. 48.

8 Bryan Lawson: *How Designers Think*, London: Taylor & Francis 1980; Paul Atkinson: "Design for Non-Designers," in: *The Design Journal*, 20 (2017) 3, pp. 303–305.

9 Robin Williams: *The Non-Designers Design Book*, London: Pearson Education 2008; John McWade: "Hiring a Designer? Eight things to Look for" (2010), under: http://www.mcwade.com/DesignTalk/2010/07/hiring-a-designer-eight-things-to-look-for/ (accessed 05/05/2019); Ana Henke: *Essential Graphics/Design Concepts for Non-Designers* [Webinar presentation, 2013], online on: https://pubs.nmsu.edu/guidelines/documents/nondesigners.pdf (accessed 25/02/2023).

10 Mark Okyere: "The Graphic Design Workforce in Ghana: A Case Study of Asafo, Kumasi," in: *Communication Design* 5 (2017) 1-2, pp. 183–202.

services) is composed of so-called NFTGDs, defined as individuals who have entered the graphic-design profession through informal apprenticeships. It became clear that many of these designers entered the field in this way as a result of their families' financial situation, after they completed their schooling, through various interviews and discussions with informants in Ghana's printing industry. These individuals immediately took up an apprenticeship in the printing industry under a master, rather than pursuing further formal education, in order to avoid becoming a burden on their families and upon society as a whole. On the basis of my previous study, I recommended that these non-formally trained designers be given some degree of formal education that focuses on those skills and key concepts that are lacking in their professional practice.

I began to engage with the academic community in my subsequent research with the aim of developing a model that could help to enhance these designers' professional practice. It was suggested that I should define the term "non-formally trained graphic designers" more precisely, given that it had been used rather vaguely throughout my proposal. This paper, therefore, seeks to answer the following questions: Who is a non-formally trained graphic designer? Why is a working definition of this concept important?

The present study began with informal correspondence about my proposed topic with academics in the field of design (August 2016–October 2018). Through these email exchanges, it became clear to me that few researchers are focused on the concept of non-designers or, in my terminology, in NFTGDs. Scant attention seems to be paid to NFTGDs in design research, despite their contributions to the field. As mentioned previously, about 82% of the graphic design workforce in Asafo, a town in Kumasi, Ghana, is comprised of NFTGDs. Moreover, a recent survey conducted by my local collaborator between December 2020 and March 2021 showed that there are 1,636 graphic designers in Accra and Kumasi, representing 33.5% of the combined printing industry's workforce in these regions (4,867). The breakdown of the remainder of the workforce is: compositors (5), machine minders (2,243), guillotine operators (1), book binders (8), stationery sellers (324), paper sellers (451), machine engineers (40), ruling machine operators (79), and print material sellers (80). The present study builds upon both the existing literature on this concept and the feedback obtained from the professional (academic) community. It also draws on ideas about six key stakeholders in the profession.[11]

---

11 Karel van der Waarde: "Professional Reflection and Visual Arguments for Patients: Is Graphic Design Really a Critical Practice?" in: Chris Brisbin/Myra Thiessen (eds.): *The Routledge Companion to Criticality in Art, Architecture, and Design*, Abingdon: Routledge 2018, pp. 350–368.

Literature review: the concept of non-designers

Few studies have focused on the concept of non-designers on the global level in the last four decades. My online search for keywords relating to this concept yielded terms like "amateur,"[12] "non-designer,"[13] "novice" (as opposed to "expert"),[14] and "do-it-yourself."[15] Other relevant terms included "naïve" (as opposed to "experienced") designers,[16] "lay designers,"[17] "design without designers,"[18] "expert" and "diffuse" designers,[19] and my own preferred term "non-formally trained graphic designers."[20]

Situated learning – Theoretical framework

Situated learning[21] was the main theoretical approach employed, given its usefulness for studying individuals who are undergoing apprenticeship training. The study's participants had completed informal apprenticeships throughout the course of their career as graphic designers at one of the three sites visited: Accra New Town, Akotolante, and Asafo.

12 Robert A. Stebbins: *Amateurs:* On the *Margin Between Work & Leisure*, Beverley Hills: Sage 1979 (Sociological Observations, Vol. 6).

13 E.g., ibid.; van der Waarde: "Professional Reflection and Visual Arguments for Patients"; Okyere: "The Graphic Design Workforce in Ghana"; Williams: *The Non-Designers Design Book*; Lawson: *How Designers Think*; Zeegen; "What Use is Design Education?"

14 Nigel Cross: "Expertise in Design: An Overview," in: *Design Studies* 25 (2004) 5, pp. 427–441; Lars Lindström: "Novice or Expert? Conceptions of Competence in Metalwork," in: id. (ed.): *Technology Education in New Perspectives: Research, Assessment and Curriculum Development*, Stockholm: HLS 2005, pp. 61–83.

15 Paul Atkinson: "Do it Yourself: Democracy and Design," in: *Journal of Design History* 19 (2006) 1, pp. 1–10.

16 Martin A. Siegel/Erik Stolterman: "Metamorphosis: Transforming Non-Designers into Designers," in: *Undisciplined! DRS International Conference 2008*, Sheffield: Design Research Society 2008, https://dl.designresearchsociety.org/drs-conference-papers/drs2008/researchpapers/2/ (accessed 03/02/2023).

17 Sarah T. Owens: "A Study of Lay Graphic Communication," in: Nick Bryan-Kinns et al. (eds.): *Proceedings of the Seventh ACM Conference on Creativity and Cognition*, New York: ACM 2009, p. 341, https://doi.org/10.1145/1640233.1640290.

18 Jan-Henning Raff/Gavin Melles: "Design Without Designers: Thinking Everyday Design Practice," in: *Design Philosophy Papers* 10 (2012) 1, pp. 23–33.

19 Manzini: "Design in a Changing, Connected World."

20 Okyere: "The Graphic Design Workforce in Ghana."

21 Jean Lave/Etienne Wenger: *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, New York: Cambridge University Press 1991.

Methodology

The study's methodology was qualitative and involved an ethnographic research design. I sent my proposal to academic experts between August 2016 and October 2018 in order to solicit feedback. I subsequently conducted fieldwork in October 2019 and then again from March to mid-November 2020, in which I employed participant observation and interviews, supplemented by artworks collected from design participants. I made use of content analysis to analyze the written feedback and relevant literature, as well as relational analysis to analyze interviews from the field. Ethical guidelines concerning informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and the do-no-harm principle were all observed. Multiple methods were employed during the ten-month-long fieldwork in order to deepen my understanding of both the topic and the designers' working conditions.

I compared the theoretical accounts found in the research literature with the feedback I received from scholars, researchers, authors, academics, and designers from 23 countries around the world. The significant terminological variation observed with regard to the concept of "non-designers" or "NFTGDs" suggests a fundamental lack of consensus. This could perhaps be explained in terms of the contested nature of the practice of non-formally trained graphic designers in different geographic locations. It could also point to a lack of insight into the lived experience of graphic designers in developing nations. Whatever the case may be, the present study seeks to shed light on a group of graphic designers whose voices have been excluded from the scholarly discourse about the graphic-design profession.

17 different terms – results and discussion

The key findings of the study are:

- The respondents used seventeen different terms to designate what I referred to in my proposal as "non-formally trained graphic designers."
- There is no terminological consensus among scholars within the academic community.

These findings confirm Morley's claim that "many disagreements (academic, legal, diplomatic, personal) arise as a result of different interpretations of the same term. In academic writing, teachers and their students often have to explore these differing interpretations before moving on to study a topic."[22]

---

22 John Morley: *Academic Phrasebank: A Compendium of Commonly Used Phrasal Elements in Academic English in PDF Format*, Manchester: University of Manchester 2014, p. 46.

The main terms used to refer to the concept under investigation, which were identified in the content analysis of the written feedback, were: untrained designers (n=4), non-professional designers (n=2), novice designers (n=5), self-taught designers (n=2), non-formally trained graphic designers (n=10), and non-designers (n=2). Other terms that appeared once were: vernacular design, non-formally educated graphic designers, layperson, amateur, do-it-yourself, non-educated designers, uneducated designers, non-formal designers, non-traditionally trained graphic designers, informally trained designers, self-trained designer, and beginner designer.

Content analysis might help readers to understand who is being referred to as a non-designer by providing essential context when it comes to publications. The results of such an analysis show the contested nature of the gray area within the field of design, as well as the superficial way in which the professional community has defined the concept of non-designers. For example, John McWade—a graphic designer and author, as well as creative director of *Before & After* (a magazine on graphic design)—employed the term "non-designer" in a design talk. He writes:

> "Dear readers: A colleague – a non-designer – wrote to me last week asking for help in hiring a 'creative services lead' to head up a new project for his business. What should he look for in a designer? Here are the eight qualities I like. 1) Passion, vision and self-motivation. [...] 2) Vocabulary. [...] 3) Inquisitive intelligence. [...] 4) Good conceptual skills. [...] 5) A portfolio. [...] 6) Projects. [...] 7) Real-world experience. [...] 8) Production skills."[23]

Although he does not provide readers with further details about this non-designer colleague of his (presumably for ethical reasons), he would probably be able to provide a comprehensive definition that would justify a designer's eight qualities, which he identifies, if he were to define a non-designer.

McWade briefly lists, in note format, what a "non-designer" should look for when hiring a "creative services lead" here. The text itself is written in plain, conversational English, making it accessible to non-specialists and the reader can also contribute to the conversation in the comments section below the article on his website. Looking at this account of the "non-designer," we can conclude that while the short definition provided is clear, precise, and relevant, it lacks depth because it does not address the term's complexities. In my view, this text's purpose is to provide a brief answer to the question: "What qualities should a non-designer look for when hiring a designer?" In this context, the answer that he gives is acceptable, since he is not interested in giving a general definition of the term "non-designer." It is plausible to infer from this that McWade might define a non-designer simply as someone who does not practice the profession of (graphic) designer.

23 McWade: "Hiring a Designer?"

A second example is the use of the concept of "lay designers" by Sarah Owens in her thesis summary "A Study of Lay Graphic Communication":

> "In this thesis, the term 'lay' is used to indicate aspects of the 'non-expert' and 'non-professional'. Lay designers thus possess neither the specialist skill or knowledge of experts, nor do they engage in a specialist activity as a means of earning a living (as do professionals). Amateurs, in contrast, may possess a high level of competence and work to professional standards, but pursue the chosen activity as a pastime [Stebbins, 1979]."[24]

In this text, the fact that Owens goes beyond a short and simple three-part definition is explained by her intended readership. As a PhD candidate at the University of Reading (UK), she needed to provide the sort of broader definition typically required from graduate students. Owens introduces two further terms: "non-expert" and "non-professional" in attempting to explain the term "lay designers." This need to expand the definition to include other terms hints at the concept's complexity. Finally, she introduces a third term "amateur," taken from Stebbins, which she uses as a point of contrast.[25]

A third example comes from Paul Atkinson, editor-in-chief of the journal *Design Issues*. Atkinson, Professor of Design at Sheffield Hallam University (UK), wrote about "Do It Yourself" in the context of an exhibition held in 2006, stating:

> "This exhibition regards any creative activity carried out by people not trained in design as 'Do It Yourself' […]. This exhibition does not attempt to construct a developmental history of Do It Yourself, but it does provide some indication of how the concept of DIY has been variously received over time."[26]

Atkinson openly acknowledges the term's complexity and enumerates some of its key aspects in familiar language. However, he does not provide readers with a precise definition of the term. Anyone who engages in a creative activity, despite lacking training in design, rather than relying on professionals may be labelled "DIY."

The acronym "DIY" is also used by Ellen Lupton, an author, designer, editor, curator, and lecturer at Maryland Institute of College of Art (US). Whereas "DIY" stands for "Do It Yourself" for Atkinson,[19] Lupton gives it the added meaning "Design It Yourself." She then goes on to state:

---

24 Sarah T. Owens: *A Study of Lay Graphic Communication* [five-page thesis summary in my possession, s.l., s.a., pp. 2f.].

25 Stebbins: *Amateurs*.

26 Paul Atkinson: *Do It Yourself: Democracy and Design* [show/exhibition, unpublished], https://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/169/1/AtkinsonDIY.pdf, pp. 2f.

> "Do-it-yourself is everywhere. Around the world, people are making things them-selves in order to save money, to customize goods to suit their exact needs and interests, and to feel less dependent on the corporations that manufacture and distribute most of the products and media we consume."[27]

Atkinson and Lupton play with different formulations of the term in order to ex-pand the concept of DIY. It is broadly acceptable for designers to use different terms to express the same concept, given that they often opt to express ideas in different and unique ways, such as that of "non-designers." This notwithstanding, this varia-tion becomes problematic when several different definitions are formulated for the same concept. The fundamental challenge, therefore, is to attain clarity about the core concept's meaning to which these various terms refer. Once the core concept has been properly defined, it will not matter which words are used to refer thereto.

Tim Marshall uses the term "non-designers" in the *Design Dictionary* to explain the concept of synergy in situations where either only designers or a mix of de-signers and non-designers collaborate on a given project. Marshall writes:

> "'Synergy' is most commonly used to describe the process whereby two or more people or organizations with complementary skills, resources, and knowledge are able to achieve more through collaboration than the simple addition of their ef-forts working individually would have suggested. Thus, synergy best describes the goal of the collaborative processes (Collaborative Design) used by design teams – be they teams of designers or of designers and non-designers."[28]

Everyone stands to benefit when there is cooperation among all the parties rep-resented in a collaborative design thanks to synergy. Without such collaboration, disagreement will ensue and the project might not succeed as one would expect. Synergy puts all of the parties on the same level, so that each team member, in-cluding the non-designers, knows precisely what is expected from the collabora-tion in light of a particular design goal.

Juliette Cezzar is an assistant professor and associate director of the BFA Com-munication Design program at Parsons/The New School (US). In *The AIGA Guide to Careers in Graphic and Communication Design*, she writes:

> "If a client isn't able to see the needs of the end user, it's the designer's responsi-bility to explain what those needs are and why they should be considered and pri-

---

27 Ellen Lupton: "Why D.I.Y.?" in: id. (ed.): *D.I.Y. Design It Yourself: A Design Handbook*, New York: Prince-ton Architectural Press 2006, pp. 16–21, here p. 18.

28 Timothy Marshall: "Synergy," in: Michael Erlhoff/Timothy Marshall (eds.): *Design Dictionary: Per-spectives on Design Terminology*, Basel: Birkhäuser 2008, p. 388.

oritized, and to suggest a process that considers the needs of that end user. Since many non-designers think of design as subjective, this teaching and modelling is a necessary part of the designer's toolbox. And when designers work for more than one stakeholder — which is often the case — managing both the design process and the relationships within the group of decision makers is necessary to bring the design to completion."[29]

In other words, a designer should (be able to) explain the needs of the end user to the client, if the latter is unaware of them. In this context, clients may be termed "non-designers"– as was the case for McWade.[30] These non-designers may perceive design to be subjective, thereby requiring an explanation of the choices made by the designer.

In a conference paper entitled "What are the social responsibilities of designers? Investigating new prespectives [sic] for design participation," Yanki Lee asserts:

"The clearest example of self-motivated design practice by non-professional people is the do-it-yourself culture. Do-it-yourself (DIY) has been called the only real Design Participation in which the people invent their own rules (Banham, 1972:7). This practice has developed since the publication of early design magazines such as *Practical Householder* in the 50s. Its development is what Banham suggested as 'an alternative design culture' (ibid.), i.e., one which is not manipulated by the design community. While more and more DIY superstores such as B&Q, are opening around the world, and with the help of DIY television programmes, this 'alternative' culture is providing power to the people and encouraging the transformation of Design Participation for motivation."[31]

Lee explores how the concept of "do-it-yourself" (DIY) has been called the only real "Design Participation," in which people are allowed to invent their own rules. This notion can be traced back to the early design magazines from the 1950s, such as *Practical Householder*, which was not controlled by the design community and, hence, acquired a reputation in alternative design culture. Similar subcultures have emerged in recent times, in which people make use of different electronic devices to design things themselves and then share them on social media.

---

29 Juliette Cezzar: *The AIGA Guide to Careers in Graphic and Communication Design*, New York: Bloomsbury Academic 2018, p. 20.

30 McWade: "Hiring a Designer?"

31 Yanki Lee: "What are the social responsibilities of designers? Investigating new prespectives for design participation," conference paper, 2007. www.sd.polyu.edu.hk/iasdr/proceeding/papers/What%20are%20designers%20social%20responsibility.pdf (accessed 21/05/2022).

The texts cited above employ a variety of terms to refer to the core concept of "non-designers" at different levels of detail. This terminological complexity mirrors the diverse audiences that the individual writers aim to address, be they academic in nature or the general public. Moreover, it seems that designers are often insufficiently interested in defining terms. Instead, the usage of different expressions reflects the practice of design as storytelling; this is in line with the idea that graphic design begins when someone has a story to tell. Thus, the diversity of terms may be a byproduct of a desire to sound unique, rather than of any concrete need to employ variant terms in specific contexts. If this is true, then I suggest that a single term could be agreed upon and could be adequately defined.

Definitions of "graphic design" and/or "graphic designer" by study participants

I asked study participants to give a definition of the terms "graphic design" and/or "graphic designer" as a counterpoint to the definitions given by academics and professional designers (presented previously) during the course of my ethnographic fieldwork in Ghana. Isaac, a graphic designer based in Accra, described graphic design as follows:

> "[I]t's all about putting your ideas on paper, like into paper, posters, magazines, call cards, letterheads, certificates, and stuff; so basically, graphic design is all about creating beautiful images on whether paper or what do you call it [tries to recall a word from memory] the internet word..."[32]

David, a designer, recalled what he had learnt in senior high school (SHS), although he did not study graphic design as an elective subject (presumably he was relying on what he had learnt in the class "General Knowledge in Art," a compulsory subject for all visual-arts students in Ghana):

> "I want to get that definition and add to the experience that I have now. It said that [a] graphic designer is someone who brings text, words, and images together to make a complete something [meaning]."[33]

I asked the designer Ishmael how he defines a graphic designer, to which he answered:

---

32   Author's interview with Isaac, Accra, October 4, 2019.

33   Author's interview with David, Accra, October 5, 2019.

"[M]ost often we get a lot of people who ask us: what do you do? And I say I am a graphic designer. And they go like: what do graphic designers really do? So … I listen to whatever the person wants and put it in motion. And if possible give it out in a softcopy for the person to see. I just give them an example like: we design and print stuff like T-shirts, signboards, and all that."[34]

As samples from my fieldnotes, I include the following excerpts:

MO: "If someone asks you–what is your profession?–what response would you give?"
Luke   "Someone asked me what I do as my job? I reply with–I'm a graphic designer."
MO: "And if the person asked further–what does it mean?"
Luke: "I design obituaries When I say that he will understand.
       So, when the person sees anything graphic, he points–this–and then I reply–yes."
MO: "OK."
Luke: "For me, I start with an obituary as an example of the type of works I do."
MO: "That's the common thing they can identify with what you do as your job. Because people die and their posters are fixed at vantage points."[35]

The participants gave a brief definition of "graphic design" or "graphic designer" as they understood the terms and on the basis of their design practice. Two participants sought to provide a definition of who a graphic designer is by appealing to relevant knowledge about the definition that they had previously acquired at the senior high school level. The designers demonstrated a good understanding of what they do and were able to describe their profession in response to queries from laypeople. The results of the interviews also corroborate the findings of Arbnor and Bjerke,[36] who claimed that the question "What is design?" elicited a response from participants in which they sought to give a general meaning to the term "design," rather than providing a narrow definition. This contrasts with what was found in the literature and in which a simple three-part definition was often adopted.[37]

---

34 Author's interview with Ishmael in Accra, 07/10/2019.

35 Author's fieldnotes from conversation with Luke in Accra, 08/10/2019.

36 Ingeman Arbnor/Björn Bjerke: *Methodology for Creating Business Knowledge*, London: Sage 1997, p. 548.

37 McWade: "Design, in Context."

Answers to the questions

a) **Who is a non-formally trained graphic designer?**
I propose the following definition based on the work of van der Waarde[38] and the literature on the subject:

"A non-formally trained graphic designer is a designer who lacks a formal education in design, but has the ability to communicate with clients, works within the legal framework of the region in which they operate, may or may not be part of a professional community, and ensures that the design that they produce is useful to both users and society more generally."

This definition is clear and precise, similar to what Cruess, Johnston, and Cruess[39] have suggested in defining the term "profession" in relation to the field of medicine. It also takes all of the discipline's stakeholders who could benefit therefrom into account.

b) **Why is a working definition important?**
The proposed definition has something to offer all stakeholders, both within and beyond the field of design. It can help design educators to present the big picture, showing designers how they can advance beyond their current level of expertise and enhance their effectiveness by dealing with the challenges that arise in a profession in which technology plays a central role and in which a new skill set has to be acquired to meet the field's current demands.

Conclusion

We can affirm that different approaches may be used to define a concept in a given field on the basis of this study's analysis. In the present context, the term "non-designer" may be defined based on one or more of the following criteria:

- qualities, attributes, characteristics, or behavior patterns;[40]
- six perspectives that take all stakeholders into account;[41]

---

38 van der Waarde: "Professional Reflection and Visual Arguments for Patients."

39 Sylvia R. Cruess/Sharon Johnston/Richard L. Cruess: "'Profession': A Working Definition for Medical Educators," in: *Teaching and Learning in Medicine* 16 (2004) 1, pp. 74–76, https://doi.org/10.1207/s15328015tlm1601_15. (accessed: 23/10/2023)

40 McWade: "Hiring a designer?"

41 van der Waarde: "Professional Reflection and Visual Arguments for Patients."

- a review of related literature on the usage of the term "non-designers";
- a specific frame of reference and its functions;

These findings answer the research question in a way that could benefit all stake-holders involved in a design project. This answer builds upon the brief definitions presented previously by scholars who may have borrowed the term in an attempt to provide context to their arguments in particular articles.

It is worth noting that data from other stakeholders, such as clients, regula-tors, users/people, and society, as highlighted by van der Waarde,[42] have not yet been collected to pave a way for analysis in order to solicit their views on the defi-nition proposed. It is impossible to collect and analyze all of the publications in which the term has been used, some of which were printed in other languages and would have to be translated. That said, the definition proposed here is an attempt to address the need for a definition that clearly puts everyone on the same page when it comes to referring to non-designers.

The study's findings could be generalized, in the sense that all geographic re-gions potentially contain practicing graphic designers who lack any formal ed-ucation in the field and who possess varying legal statuses. I presume that the legal requirements will be ignored by these practitioners within many developing nations, given that they may not be able to afford payments related to their busi-ness registration.

Suggestions and recommendations for future research, policy, or practice supported by the findings

Future academic research should shed more light on what is happening in related design disciplines by drawing from and expanding upon the analysis conduct-ed in this work. I suggest that the definition proposed be employed by training practitioners from around the globe, specifically those running workshops and seminars for individuals from a non-formally trained graphic design background, who may want to explain the term's origins to their participants. Teachers may also employ the definition in an attempt to explain the role of graphic designers, the activities they engage in, and the forms of knowledge they possess to their students. The working definition proposed here is an attempt to address critiques of graphic-design research, whose intellectual and theoretical underpinning are generally thought to be weak.[43]

---

42 Ibid.

43 Sue Walker: "Research in Graphic Design," in: *The Design Journal*, 20 (2017) 5, pp. 549–559.

Future research into the term may attempt to build consensus by using a Delphi approach among experts with regard to the term and its definition. This approach involves surveying and collecting opinions from experts on a specific subject[44] and, in my case, from design experts in academia and industry. This will, in turn, contribute to knowledge in the field of Communication Design. A theory about non-designers should be developed with reference to a range of different regions, in order to better understand the nuances of their operations and the factors that affect their work as designers, while the proposed working definition may be explored further with stakeholders.

I have attempted to inductively define the term "non-designer" and its equivalent "non-formally trained graphic designer" in this paper so that readers might understand exactly what I mean by the term in discussions about my doctoral proposal or in one-on-one conversations with design participants (and other stakeholders). As Morley states, "when important words are not clearly understood misinterpretation may result."[45] The analysis conducted here will help to minimize misinterpretations of the concept of non-formally trained graphic designers.

Concerning the variety of terms that emerged from my correspondence with experts, I suggest that stakeholders refrain from using expressions that could stigmatize design practitioners from a non-design background. This is important because it became clear, through my informal discussions with some stakeholders, that I should avoid using the expression "non-formally trained" in NFTGD, as some feel that it stigmatizes designers who are "not trained" in contrast to their "trained" counterparts. This is especially important in cultures in which these designers face challenges linked to inclusivity, diversity, equity, and access.

---

44 Muhammad Imran Yousuf: "Using Experts' Opinions Through Delphi Technique," in: *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, 12 (2007) 4, pp. 1–8, https://doi.org/10.7275/rrph-t210.

45 Morley: *Academic Phrasebank*, p. 46.