

Digital Illustrations in Journalism

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Abstract

Since 1970's artists were attracted towards computers and with the aid of Illustrators and Photoshop, illustrators were able to explore digital motifs and patterns. In the late 1980's, illustrators blended the tools of drawing, painting, photography and software which resulted in perfect digital illustration. Later it is widely seen in print media and digital media around the globe. Today visual language is used over many different mediums, the language they have created by illustrated journalists are transformative catalyst for change as they present the complexities of a social issue, raise awareness and inspire action or thought. The digital era has given all creative people a great platform to explore their ideas.

This paper focuses on the creative process, techniques and the experience from illustrator's perspective. With the technological advancements, how far illustrations are narrative and innovative in the field of journalism will be discussed. The recent trends in digital illustration and its vital role in complementing journalism will also be highlighted.

Keywords: Digital Illustration, Creative process, Story Telling, Illustrated Journalism

Introduction

Digital illustration is the technique of using a computer with software to create original art work. Illustrators are artist who have chosen the printed page and the digital platform as their vehicle for making pictures, allowing their work to be seen by millions of people. (Bossert, 1997). Illustrators played an important role in visualizing the unimaginable worlds. The late 1970s had seen the births of both Apple and Microsoft, as this new medium entered popular culture, the type of art being produced changed. In the late 1980s artist like Faure Walker utilized the tools of drawing, painting, photography and computer software, blending and exploiting the different characteristics of each (Vam).

The prime focus is to find the creative process and the techniques of digital illustrators and how far they are able to travel with the digital media. Their view on digital illustration and also about the recent trends. The goal is achieved with the various aspects of viewing and understanding digital medium from the contemporary context and the reason for travelling with the digital medium is also attained. Their viewpoint of illustrated journalism and the power

of illustration are also expressed. The aesthetics and the ethics of illustration in also gained. The interaction with the illustrators traces the contribution to the field of journalism and their connection with the society. Also whether "digital illustration complement journalism" was raised to the illustrators and they have expressed their opinion literally.

Materials

Zappaterra in the book "Illustration" discusses about the adaptation of the digital tools which leads for greater creative experimentation, it has crossed the boundaries to a point where the "illustrator" becoming meaningless and the artist are becoming "visual communicators" (Zappaterra, 1998). The features of the software and techniques used for the purpose of illustration is highlighted.

For Jodie Harrison, Illustration is a wonderful tool that has become part of our editorial DNA. There was something beautiful and nostalgic about bringing that art form onto a minimal and modern platform. (Scriberia). It is artist freedom to express his views and thoughts from his own experience.

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Mikey Burton, an illustrator and graphic designer, in his interview for Story Bench, he wants the illustration to spark an idea or a different way of looking at the article. (Story bench) For him even a spot illustration which is anything under a half page, in a side bar can engage someone on a micro-level. Brainstorming the idea for an image is his favorite part of the process. In the article he describes how digital illustration has complemented journalism.

Digital story telling tools allows for richer and more engaging journalism. (Scriberia) Illustrators can tell a story in a smarter, unique and individualistic way. Graphic journalism is an experimental form of visual storytelling merging comic art with journalistic processes. The first iPad publication dedicated exclusively to graphic journalism was launched in the United States in December 2013 named "Symbolia". It is a tablet magazine of illustrated journalism. (EJO) Stories in Symbolia appear entirely in comic form, spot animation, digital illustrations, sound and informative diagrams.

Method

Qualitative research methodology is employed for research. For data collection, Interview Method is employed through telephone which was structured.

Results

Artist Creative Process, View on Digital Illustration and Journalism

Manivannan has been illustrating digitally since 2000 in "The Hindu" and also for India Today (Tamil) in 1994. "From an artist point of view, illustration is backbone for journalism, it helps to make the reader involve into the text and tends to go through the article". Either cartoons or direct illustration, magazine like Anantha Vikatan demands to illustrate so as to reach the common people. He illustrates based on the story line, the psychology of the characters in a story or what the writer intends to share a message through his writing. It is not like direct story telling but the core point should be touched in the illustration without distorting the content.

His illustrations are very popular in "The Hindu". He has also created numerous wrappers for magazines. Also illustrated for Tamil magazines like "Thadam", "Kalasuvadu", "Nartrinai" and "Adaiyalam". According to Manivannan, digital medium only supports the artist. It helps to multiply the image, change the directions and create textures. The person who works in the digital medium decides the quality of the work; it depends upon how far he excels the technique and medium.

Karthikeyan is a freelance illustrator since 1995; he shifted to digital in 2008. He uses Photoshop and Illustrator. His works can be seen in "Pudhuvisai", "Tamarai", and

"Kanaiyazhi" and has illustrated for more than twenty magazine cover pages. Initially he starts with pencil sketch, scans and fines it with the tools in Photoshop. He focuses on the core point of a story, visualizes the turning point or sequence and creates his work. His illustrations are suggestive, for example, a bird holds a sword; a vulture placed on a flower. It has the linear quality portraying human face and features. The supporting objects in the illustration suggests the character symbolically. He says "An Illustrator must be aware of the happenings in the society, equally knowledgeable as the writer, should have unbiased political views. Only then he can do justice to the illustration." It attracts common people, literature based and political based magazines have different illustrations which talks about the mundane life, so the illustrations should vary in style. Generally magazines focus on culture, heritage, people and all facets of society.

Senthil Kumar is the only artist among the group who works only in digital medium since 2013 in various magazines and books. He illustrates for literature and arts. The main intention of the picture for a story is to highlight the core of the content. It is not portraying directly but indirectly following some patterns. He uses Photoshop, Painter and Illustrator. For him, there are more complications in manual and he says digital work is easier and the process is also like creating manually. "Digital medium supports illustration a lot, up to one hundred percent, there are more short cuts and it is faster. Drawing can be done like that on paper, while colouring there are lot of brushes to paint and create patterns. He makes use of the medium to its core; at this stage it reaches next level of illustration"

Space plays a vital role in a magazine as the text and illustration in a page are inter-related. For instance, while illustrating for poem, he concentrates on the layout space, if the poem's text is vertical, the illustration cannot be horizontal. Generally he approaches realistically without distorting the proportion of the human form but makes minor alterations like elongated necks, stretching the human form, etc., "You can tell a story in single illustration, as the old saying goes, 'Thousand words are equal to one picture'. Illustration helps to grab the reader, it creates attention "he says.

"Evolution in all fields are common so as in illustration." he utters. When Senthil started his digital illustration in 1997, there were little software to support but now there are enormous updated softwares. There is a vast difference between the software then and now. It is becoming more interactive with 'Virtual Reality' and 'Automatic Reality'. In working process, there is no feel in digital, the feel of paper and pen is absent, to alternate this there is 'IpadPro', where we can feel the surface of the paper, here drawing is done with pen digitally. He has extensively illustrated for "Anantha Vikatan", "Tadam" and "Pasumai Vikatan". Earlier

there was a situation where an artist was longing to show case their works in newspapers and magazines for their recognition. But now digital platform has created a forum to exhibit their art works all over the world through social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Rohini Mani is in the field since 2003, but into digital for the past two years. She uses Photoshop and Corel Draw. She has illustrated for "The Hindu" (English), "Kalachuvadu", "Uyirmai" and "Anthimazhai" and "Kabalapuram" (fully online magazine). As illustrator for literature part, she has the freedom to do what she feels like, but in the case of commercial they demand realistic work. People see illustration as an art work. The reader is ready to travel to next level, so there are possibilities of keeping my own point in it. If manually done, she is more related, very fast, mind and hand goes easily when she characterizes. Only for line and colour she uses digital. She chooses digital only for the purpose of execution in print media; in few magazines the paper quality is too low that the quality of the line is not clear as she expected. Her digital illustration has the manual feel as she enjoys it the most.

"Art and text together has a strong impact on readers" says Rohini Mani. While reading a text continuously it is monotonous, a piece of art element or a painting attracts the reader, breaks the monotonous and drags into the content and beautifies it. The artist's illustration adds charm to the reader and takes to next level.

Kalaiselvan is a freelance digital illustrator since 1997, has worked for "Kalachuvadu" and "Thulir", tamil magazines and also for other publications. Initially he was using only Photoshop; presently he uses Illustrator, Corel Draw and Corel Paint. He does drawing manually and only for colouring he goes digital. The content should be conceived properly before illustrating, script decides the nature of illustration whether it will be a landscape or abstract. It depends on how the writer has formed the story or article. "There cannot be a magazine without illustration, and it shouldn't be like that" says Kalaiselvan.

Velmurugan is in the field for the past fifteen years, last three years he is into digital. He draws directly in Illustrator and imports to Photoshop for colouring. While reading a story the visual of the core scene comes to his mind, he creates the sequence and uses colours according to the mood of the scene. He uses more lines and abstract forms. He is working for "Indian Express", (Tamil, Online), "Theeranathi", "Tadam, Vikatan", "Pasumai Vikatan" and "Kalki". He has illustrated in "Kumutham" for the past twelve years.

He likes the water colour and oil effects in digital. For him, online journalism has reached a wider audience as it is easily accessible. "It is always fine to have illustrations in

magazines and newspapers. It makes us to understand and experience the emotion visually as we enjoyed like that of the stage plays on those days" says Velmurugan.

Vasanth is freelance illustrator, for the past three years he is into digital journalism. He uses Sketchbook and SAI tools for his works. He has done numerous caricatures digitally, which he posts on facebook and other social media. "Manual needs more planning but in digital we can try in different style and colour spontaneously" he says. Journalism depends upon the creativity of the writer, how he expresses and how it takes shape visually in the hands of the artist.

Vinay Kumar has been working digitally since 2004. He is a freelance illustrator who has worked for "Ananda Vikatan" (DeeVali Editions), "Pudhiya Parvai" and "Kalki" among others. He uses Adobe Flash for lines, Photoshop and Illustrator for rendering. "Manual drawing needs skill but in digital it needs both skill and software understanding", says Vinay.

The artist should master the software tools; he should concentrate on the aesthetics of illustration. These days' animated drawings are seen in the quality of illustrations which has comic influence. E-magazines carry the animated illustrations which is most popular. There is a boom for digital illustration and artists are paid much for their digital works.

The findings are the role of an artist in the society, the working process, usage and importance of digital medium and purpose of mastering the tools and technique. How illustration is backbone for journalism with its innovations. The ethics of illustration and its categories. Area of focus of the magazines and purpose of travelling along with illustration.

Manivannan's opinion is digital illustration doesn't complement journalism, rather they are parallel, the artist job is to create an art work, though text is more than enough to communicate, illustration add on to the content and supports the article. Rohini also feels that illustration complements journalism, the effort of the writer, illustrator and the publisher together highlights the magazine or a journal. "Both illustration and journalism should travel parallel" is what Vasanth and Kalaiselvan feel. Kalaiselvan adds a point that digital magazine will exist forever and print media will be faded out gradually. Velmurugan agrees with this point. Karthikeyan alone views 'digital illustration has already complemented journalism' as it is easily accessible through smart phones and other electronic gadgets. As long as we survive, the alphabets and other visual forms survive. We are totally depended on the digital world and also the future generations to come.

Conclusion

The contemporary online journalism and other media have opened a platform to execute digital illustrations perfectly. The fact is that the publishers see illustration as a necessity and competition between publications has resulted in more opportunities for creative digital illustrators in media.

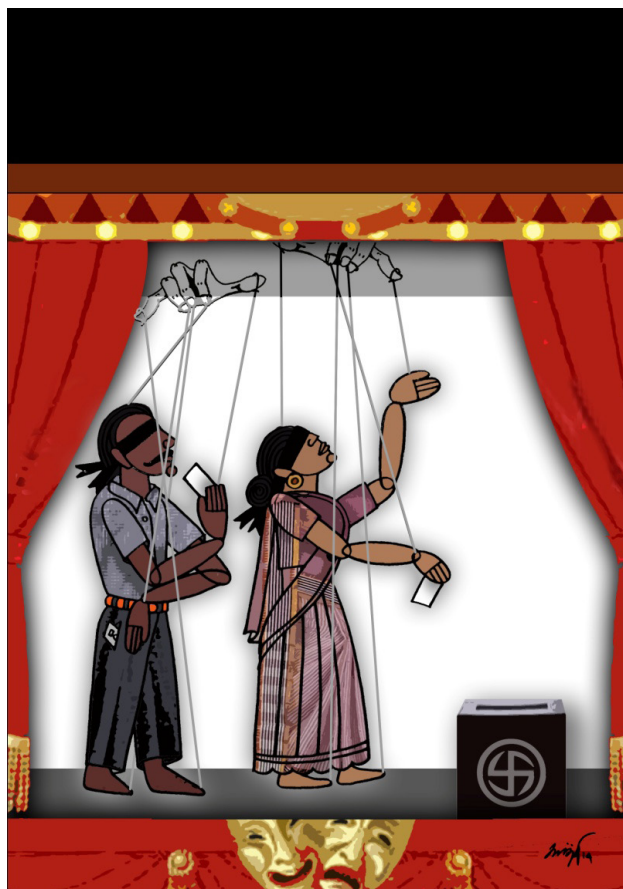


Figure 1. Illustration for *Puthuvisai* Credit: Karthikeyan



Figure 2. Illustration for *Tadam-Vikatan Publications* Credit: Manivannan



Figure 3.Jallikattu Kaalai Credit: Rohini Mani

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