# UI/UX DESIGN 101
ft. MEDIEVAL TIMES

Contents

01
Introduction

From Lord of the Rings to Game of Thrones, medieval themed movies and TV shows have garnered attention and fanbases all over the world. Let's go a little further and see what the Middle Ages has to offer for modern UI/UX principles and practices.

We understand what you are thinking. Why in the first place do we want to do that? Good question.

Just as different symbols and colours were used to represent different families, houses and individuals in medieval times, today we have branding and design elements, to distinguish ourselves from our competitors. Embark on this journey of words back to the Middle Ages with us, to find out more interesting (fr) anecdotes connecting the dots of medievalism to modernity.
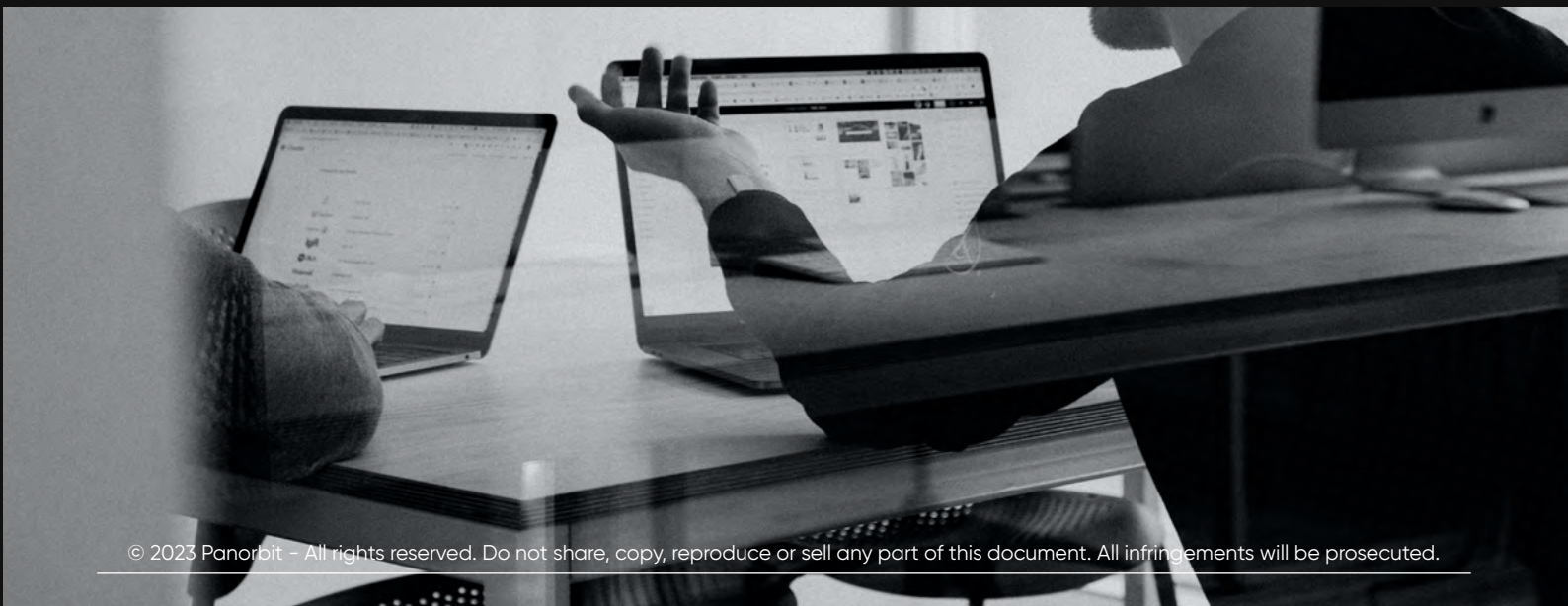
02

How do UI/UX work together?

UI (User Interface) and UX (User Experience), despite being two distinct concepts work closely together in providing a seamless user experience for any digital product. UI focuses on the visual design of the product taking care of its aesthetics and layout while UX determines how effective the product is in achieving its intended goals.

A good UI potentially attracts users, but it is the UX that keeps them engaged and satisfied. A product with great UX but a displeasing UI can be frustrating for users, leading to negative consequences. A product with a stunning UI but poor UX is highly unlikely to be successful in the long run. So, it becomes all the more essential to create a fine balance between UI and UX to provide a satisfying user experience.

03

User Interface 101

a. What is UI?

User Interface (UI) refers to visual design and presentation of an application, website or product that allows users to interact with it. The primary goal of UI is to provide an intuitive and seamless experience for the user. It includes various elements such as buttons, icons, menus and text that help users perform various functions on the app or website.

A well-designed UI improves user engagement and satisfaction, making up the personality and voice of a product and by extension, its brand. A wide range of elements like visual design, layout, typography, icons and functionality of each element ensures an efficient UI design catering to the needs of the product's target audience.

b. Importance of UI

Make sure that the UI is intuitive, easy to use and visually appealing. When done right, a great UI design increases the curiosity of the user leading them towards exploring the product or application more.

In today's world, where people's daily lives revolve around digital products for work, entertainment and communication, UI design has become increasingly important than it was ever before. A state–of-the-art UI design sets your products apart from your competitors, creating a memorable user experience leading them to recommend the product or service to others.
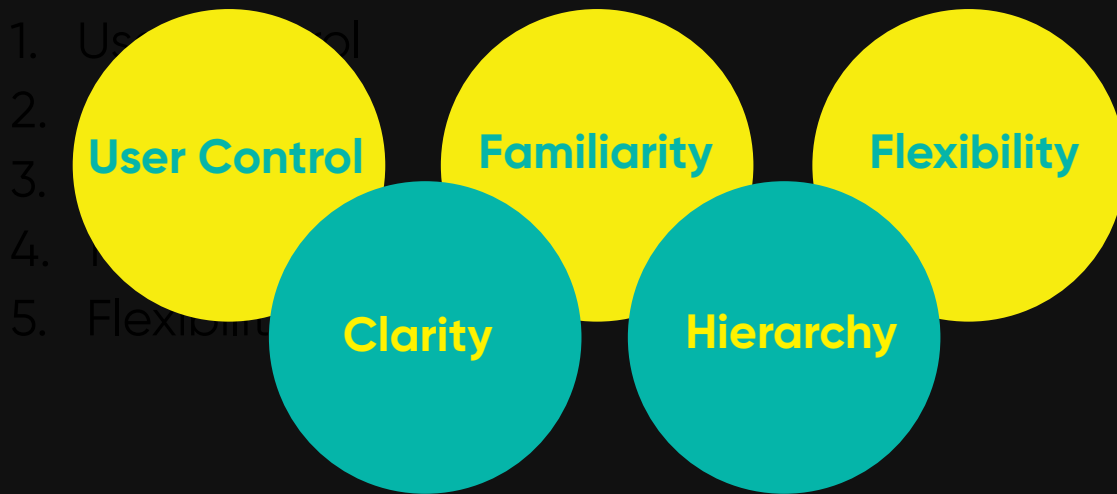
"Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist."

Pablo Picasso

c. UI Principles

Before jumping into the intricacies surrounding the UI elements, let us take a brief look into some of the key principles of UI design.

1. User Control
2.
3.
4.
5. Flexibility

User Control   **Familiarity**   **Flexibility**

Clarity   **Hierarchy**

User Control

A good UI enables users to feel like they are in control, providing easier navigation options. It is achieved by giving clear options and buttons to the users, providing immediate feedback whenever they interact with the UI. For example, if a user clicks a button, a clear indication that the desired action has been completed helps them feel in control of the interface.

Clarity

Clarity is one of the primary indicators of a well-designed UI. The UI should be easy to understand and navigate, with clear language and visual cues. This is achieved by various things like size, colour and positioning of various elements. A well-executed UI design with better interaction techniques helps grab your user's attention instantly. And research says, you only have 8 seconds to grab a user's attention, making clarity in UI design, an absolute necessity.

Familiarity

Human beings are creatures of habit, who find comfort in a sense of consistency. This becomes more important in the case of UI design, where users build a high level of familiarity while interacting with common design patterns and elements. The more familiar the user is with your interface, the more easily they will come back, increasing user retention.

Hierarchy

A strong visual hierarchy corresponds to a successful user interface. The principle of hierarchy in UI is about using visual cues to direct users' attention to the required area or elements on the screen. Ensuring visual hierarchy in the user interface ensures that the users see the most important information first, followed by other parts of your UI.

Flexibility

From novices to experts, ensure your UI is efficient for all kinds of users. The principle of flexibility is also about making your UI adaptable to different screen sizes and devices. It ensures easier usage of your UI for both desktop and mobile users. Keeping UI flexibility in mind allows easy learning for new users while helping the existing ones speed up their interaction processes.

# FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE DIGITAL AGE
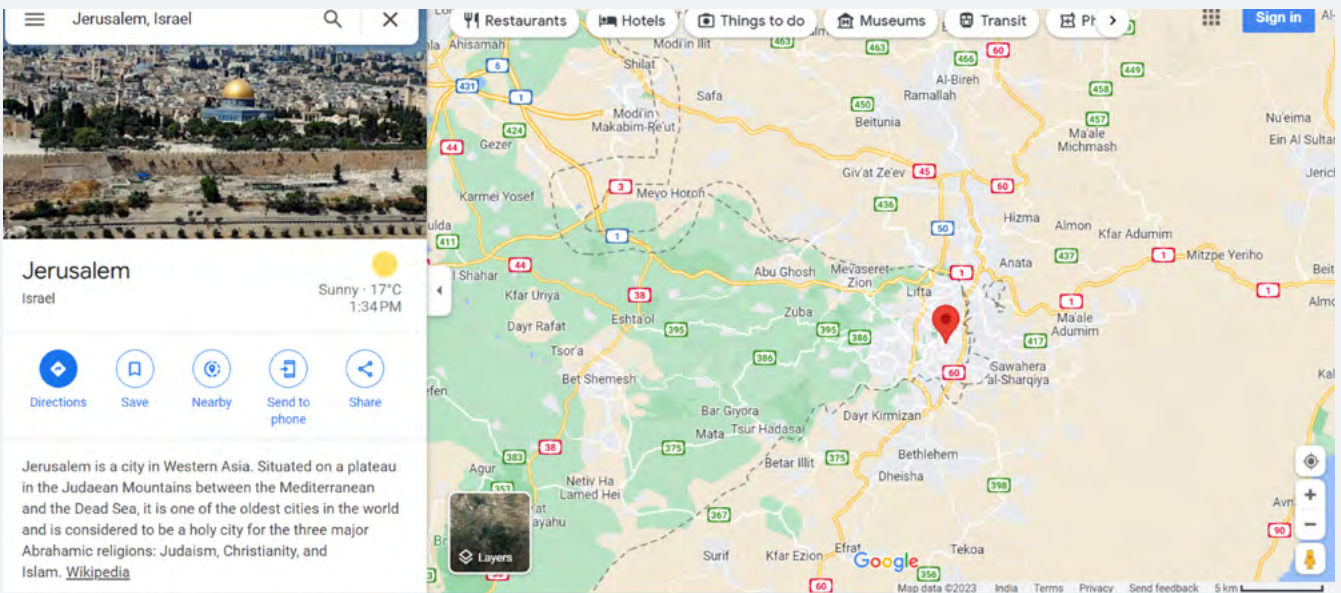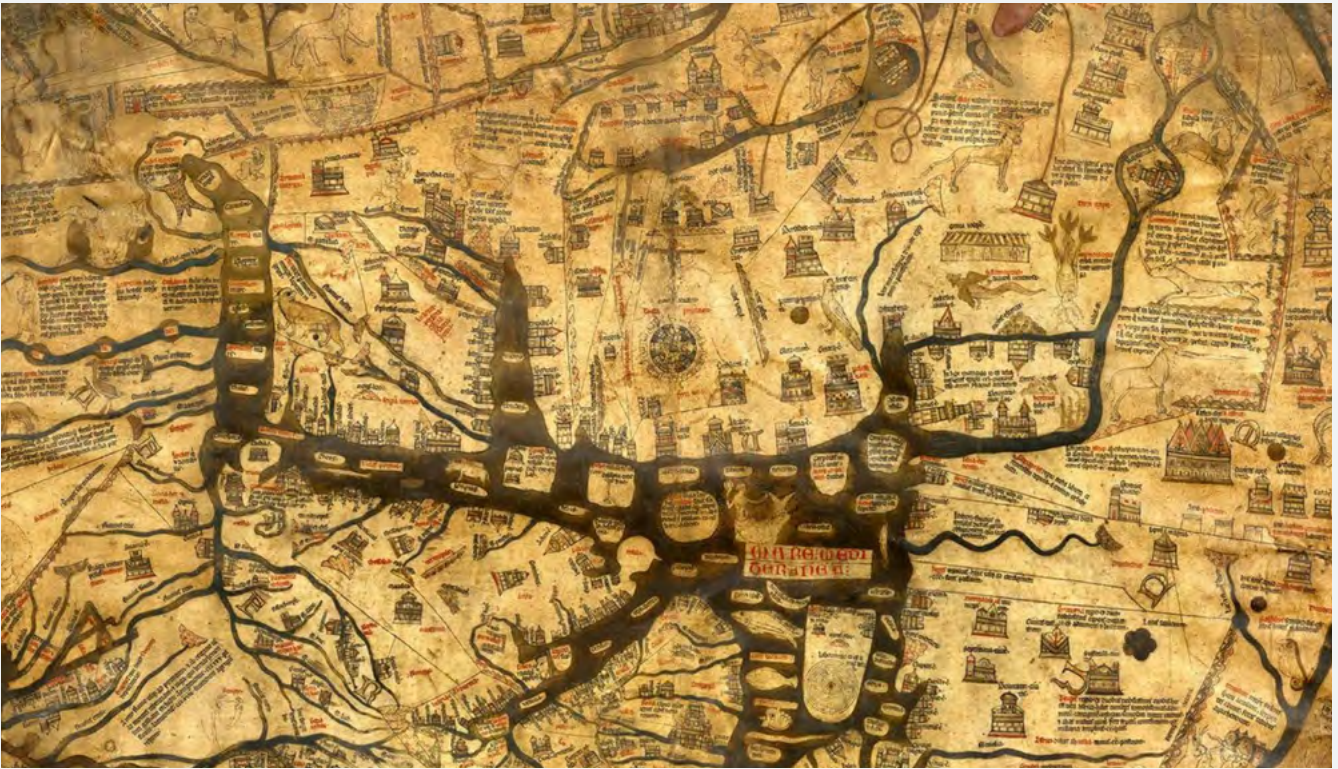
Hereford Mappa Mundi & Google Maps

Despite being created centuries apart, the Hereford Mappa Mundi of the past and Google Maps of the present share certain similarities in their UI principles.

The Hereford Mappa Mundi, a medieval world map created during the 13th century used visual hierarchy to convey information. This was done by highlighting important locations with large illustrations. Google Maps applies the same principle of visual hierarchy by prioritising popular destinations and current traffic information.

Colour coding plays a vital part in both maps. Different kinds of colours were used for different regions, like blue for the sea and green for the land. The red colour was used to denote important cities and settlements while the gold colour was used for religious places. Struck a note with the present-day Google Maps' similar colour coding techniques for mountainous terrains, roads and water bodies?
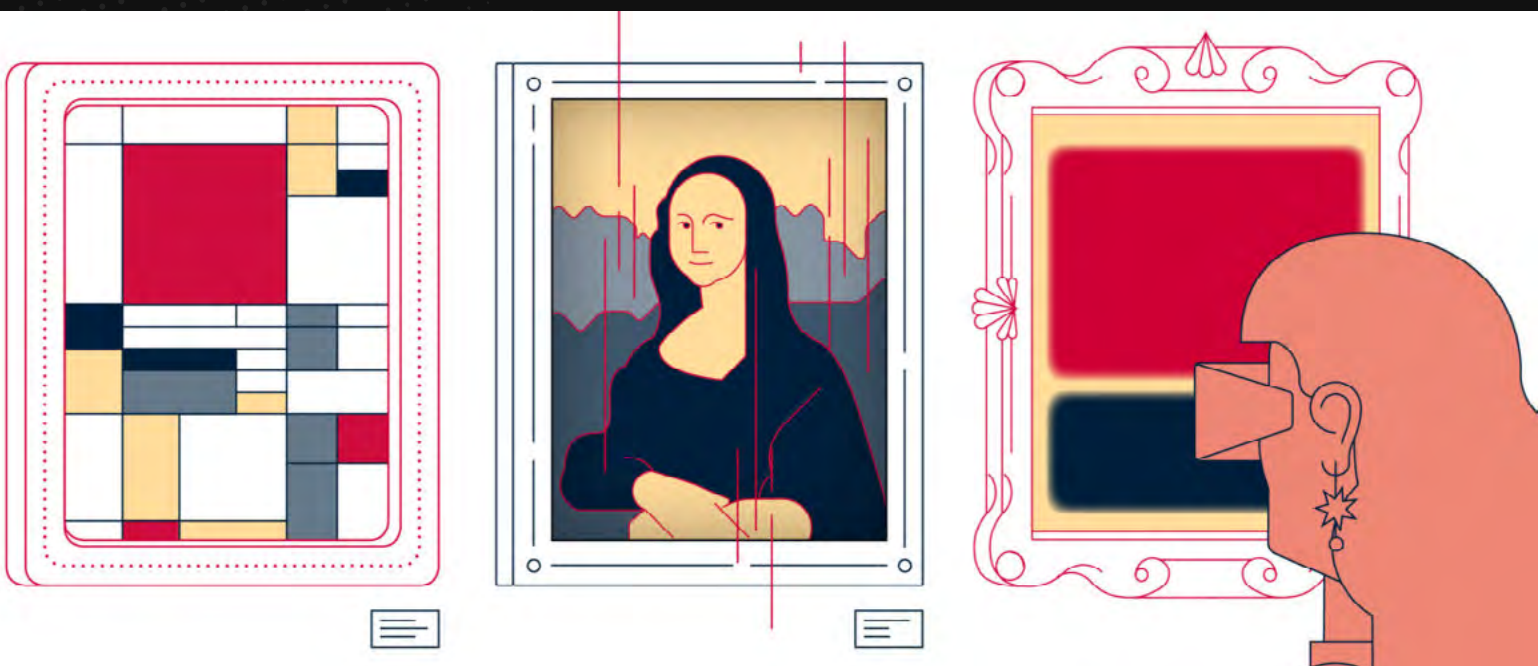
d. UI Elements

The success of a UI relies on how well-designed its UI elements are, since they play a critical role in providing a seamless and enjoyable experience to the users. The following UI elements allow users to interact with digital products such as websites or mobile applications in a simple and intuitive way.

Colour   Navigation   Forms

Typography   Buttons
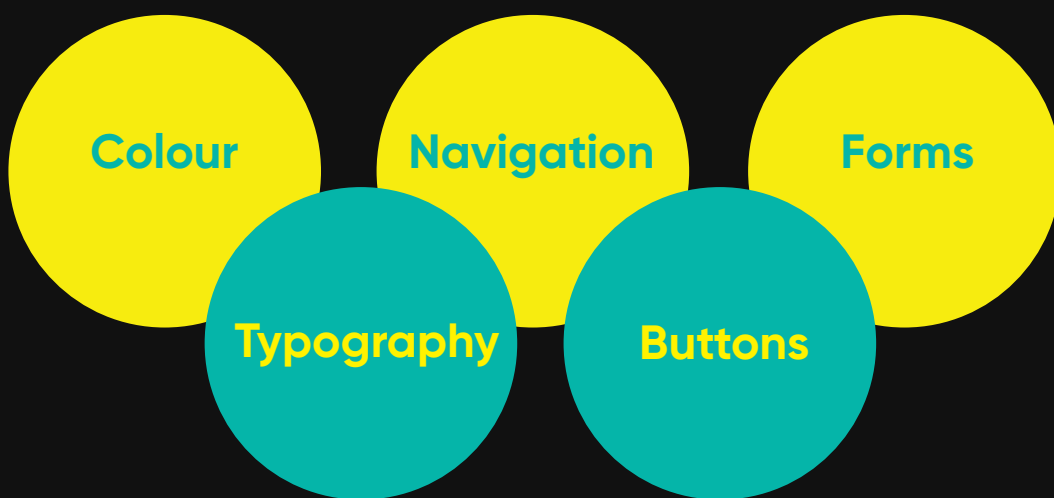
Colour is a crucial part of any UI design that helps create an emotional connection with users, having a significant impact on the user's impression of your brand. It is used to create a visual hierarchy, highlight important elements and create contrast. Colours make your product look more visually appealing while directing the user's attention to a specific part of the interface where you want to guide your users to.

Typography forms a massive part of your product. It's important to choose a legible font and size, maintaining consistency throughout your design since the text is what sells your product at times. Typography is also used to create a sense of hierarchy with the use of larger and bolder text to highlight important elements.

Navigation allows users to move through your interface and find the information or features they're looking for in your application or website. Navigation also determines the level of usability of your product, making it a priority in the mind of designers right from the early stages of UI design. A well-navigable allows users to interact with your product successfully, fulfilling their goals of using their product or website.

Buttons allow users to interact with your interface and complete actions. The usage of clear and consistent button design throughout your interface plays a significant role in how users interact with your app or website. As with colour and typography, buttons also help create a sense of visual hierarchy, easing out the experience of user interaction with your product.

Forms are critical in UI design for collecting information from users such as contact information or login credentials. While designing forms, it is important to keep in mind the usage of clear labels and interactions. This keeps the forms as simple as possible, avoiding confusion and providing only the necessary fields that are required to collect the desired information. Forms should be thoroughly tested to ensure they are easy to use and intuitive.
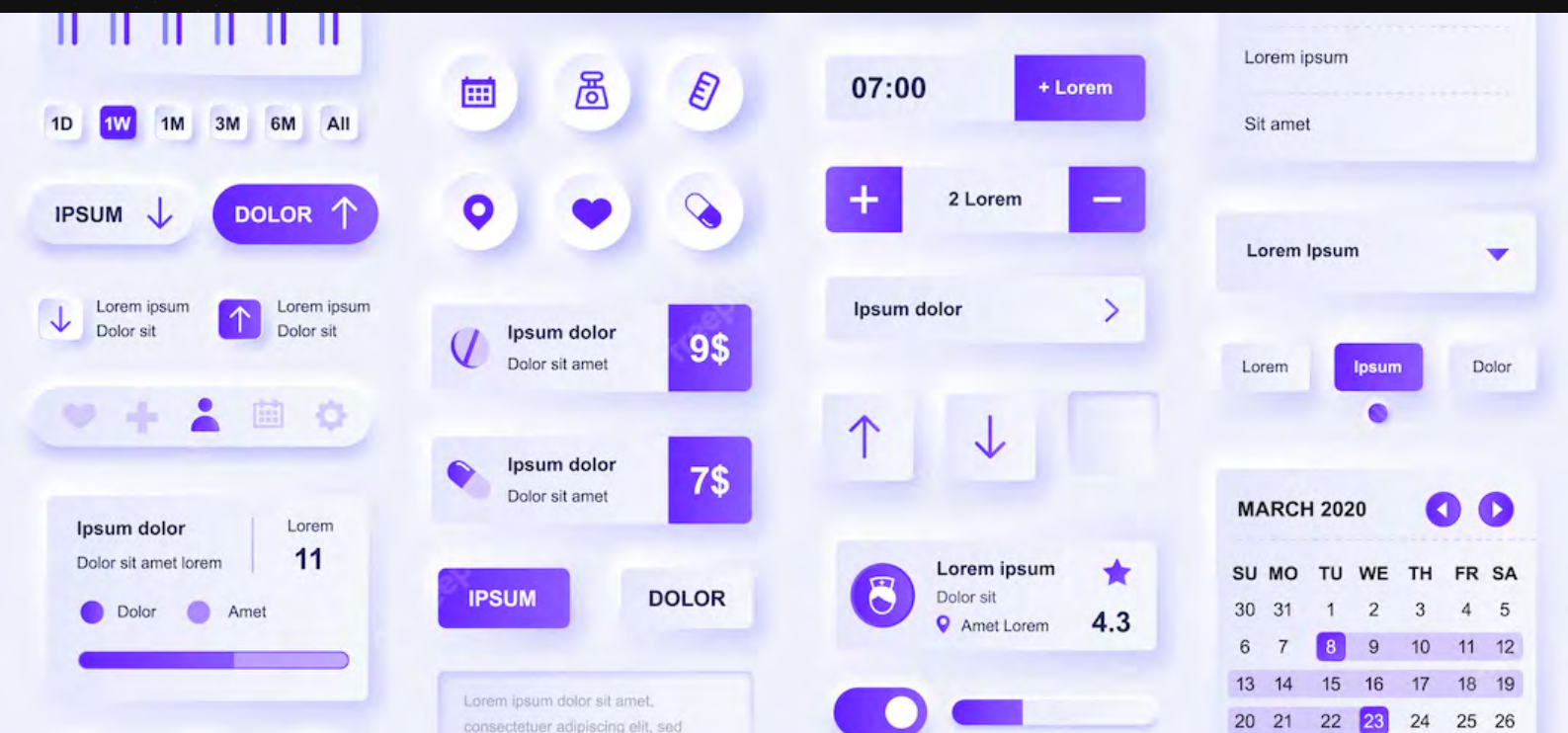
Let's take a closer look into the two primary UI elements, colour and typography, with more detail and a time travel to the medieval inspirations.

I.Colour

Importance of Colour in UI Design

Colour is an essential UI element that makes or breaks user experience. Colours are used to convey important information like the status of a button or the severity of an error message. Hence, it's important to choose the right colours for your design since different colours have different emotions and evoke different emotions.

For example, red can be used to convey urgency or danger, while green can be used to give a sense of calm or approval.

Best Practices

1.   Understand colour theory
2.   Choose the right colour palette
3.   Use colours consistently
4.   Limit the number of colours
5.   Use white space to balance colour

BRINGING MYSTICAL WORLDS TO LIFE WITH COLOUR

**The Unicorn Tapestries and
Ori and the Blind Forest video game**

The Unicorn Tapestries created around 1495–1505 and 'Ori and the Blind Forest', first released in 2015 demonstrate the importance of colour in UI design.

The Unicorn Tapestries used colour to create depth and realism, with subtle variations of hue and tone used to convey texture and shading. Similarly, in Ori and the Blind Forest, vibrant, saturated colours are used to create a sense of wonder and awe for the user in the game's mystical environments.

II. Typography

Importance of Typography in UI Design

Here's an example of what typography means for a UI design.

I will never forget you!

I will never forget you!

Typography makes a big impact on the user experience. Choosing the right font and size goes a long way in ensuring a sense of hierarchy in your design, guiding users through your interface and establishing your brand identity.
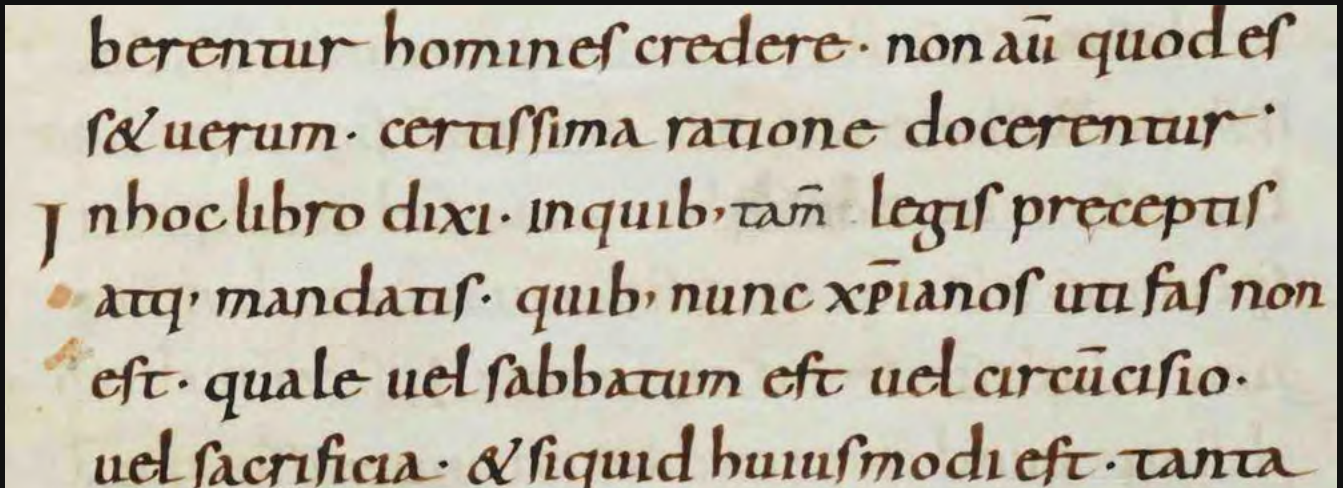
The usage of bold and italic text aids you in the purpose of highlighting the important elements. When used effectively, typography solves a lot of problems in your design, creating a cohesive and engaging experience.

Best Practices

1. Choose legible fonts
2. Keep it simple
3. Maintain consistency
4. Pay attention to alignment
5. Keep in mind, most people don't read (jk)

READING BETWEEN THE MEDIEVAL AND MODERN LINES

Carolingian Minuscule and Helvetica

Throughout history, typography has played an important role in UI design.

Carolingian minuscule, developed in the early Middle Ages, was a breakthrough in calligraphy due to its legibility and uniformity, making it easier for readers to understand and engage with written texts. Fast forward a few centuries. In the 1950s, the Helvetica font was developed and was famous for its clean lines and legibility, making it a popular choice in modern UI design.

Both Carolingian minuscule and Helvetica demonstrate the importance of typography across ages in UI design. They were designed to enhance the user's ability to read and engage with the content presented to them.

"Good design is all about making other designers feel like idiots because that idea wasn't theirs."

Frank Chimero

(Author, 'The Shape of Design')

04

User Experience 101

a. What is UX?

User Experience (UX) refers to how a user perceives and interacts with a product, website or application. It encompasses a wide variety of user experience aspects including how they feel, think and act while using the product. A good UX design ensures that the user's experience is seamless, enjoyable and intuitive.

UX design is all about creating products and services that are tailored to the needs of the target audience. A successful UX design helps increase customer satisfaction, drive engagement and sales, helping build brand loyalty. In this 21st century, businesses compete to deliver the best possible user experience stamping the importance of UX in today's product design.

b. Importance of UX

A well-designed UX considers the needs of its users, preferences and behaviours, ensuring that the product is easy to use while remaining visually appealing. Businesses can establish a unique brand identity by providing a great UX, making them stand out from their competitors.

Furthermore, UX design plays a vital role in the success of the product or service. A poorly designed UX results in user frustration that ultimately leads to a loss of revenue in business. A good UX design fosters a positive brand image with good results in return. It has become the norm that investing in a word class UX design is no longer a luxury but a necessity for businesses to strive and thrive.

c. UX Principles

USER CONTROL

It's similar to the case we have dealt with UI. Put the user in control. This means allowing them to customise their settings, providing clear navigation options and enabling them with undo options to reverse their mistakes/unintended actions. Putting the control in users' hands with a sense of easiness makes them feel empowered and confident in their interactions with your application or website.

HIERARCHY

At the simplest level, a hierarchical approach to user experience means thinking through all the functionalities and information that your product or website will contain and ensuring that the flow of interaction is natural. If implemented effectively, users easily understand the structure of your product, helping them find the information or feature they need quicker and easier.

CONFIRMATION

Confirmation is about providing users with feedback that their actions have been successful or not. This involves using messages, pop-ups and visual cues to let users know that they have completed a task successfully or there has been an occurrence of error.

By providing confirmation, you help users reduce frustration about their interaction choices and make them feel more confident to continue using your product.

ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility involves designing products or services that are accessible to and usable for as many people as possible, including those with disabilities. This involves using clear and simple language, providing alternate text for images and making sure your website can be used with screen readers. The move to prioritise accessibility helps you create a more inclusive and welcoming experience for all your users.

USABILITY TESTING

The main thing to keep in mind – the design process is not over once you release your product or publish your webpage. Usability testing involves observing users as they interact with your product or website and identifying areas for improvement. This allows you to get valuable feedback on issues like navigation, clarity and ease of use. It helps you make informed decisions regarding the ways to improve your product and march towards a more user-friendly experience.

BRIDGING THE MEDIEVAL AND MODERN GAP WITH USER EXPERIENCE
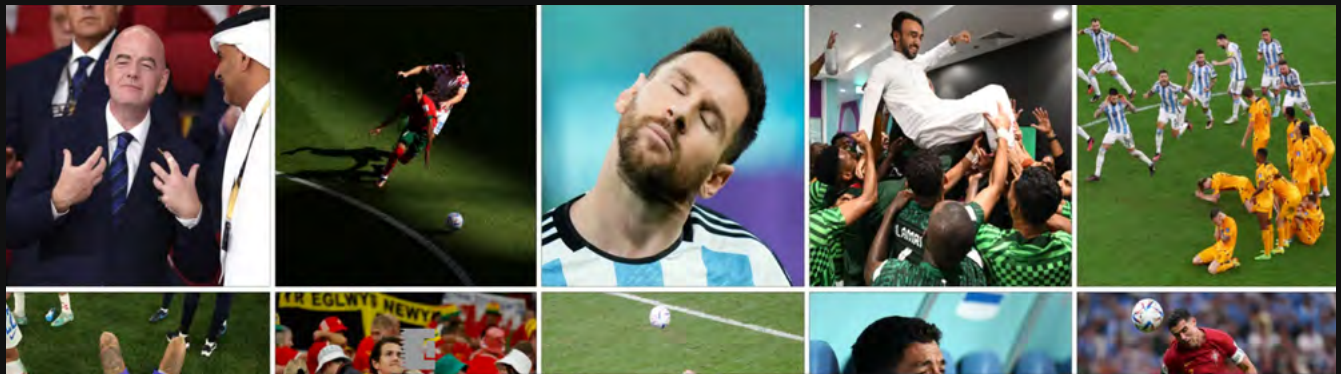
**Morgan Picture Bible and
The Guardian - 'in pictures' section**

UX design principles have always been important in creating intuitive interfaces.

The Morgan Picture Bible, a 13th-century illustrated manuscript, used a combination of visuals and text to make biblical stories easy to understand and engage with. At present, The Guardian's 'In Pictures' section is a perfect example to showcase the importance of providing engaging and informative visual content that is also easy to navigate and understand.

Both the Morgan Picture Bible and 'In Pictures' section of The Guardian demonstrates the continued and timeless relevance of UX principles in prioritising and creating a seamless UX experience.

d. Planes of UX design

UX design is a multi-dimensional field that requires a holistic approach to create interfaces that are effective and efficient, also enjoyable for the users. The 'Five Planes of UX Design' model breaks down the design process into five different planes, each with its focus and goals.

Surface

Skeleton

Structure

Scope
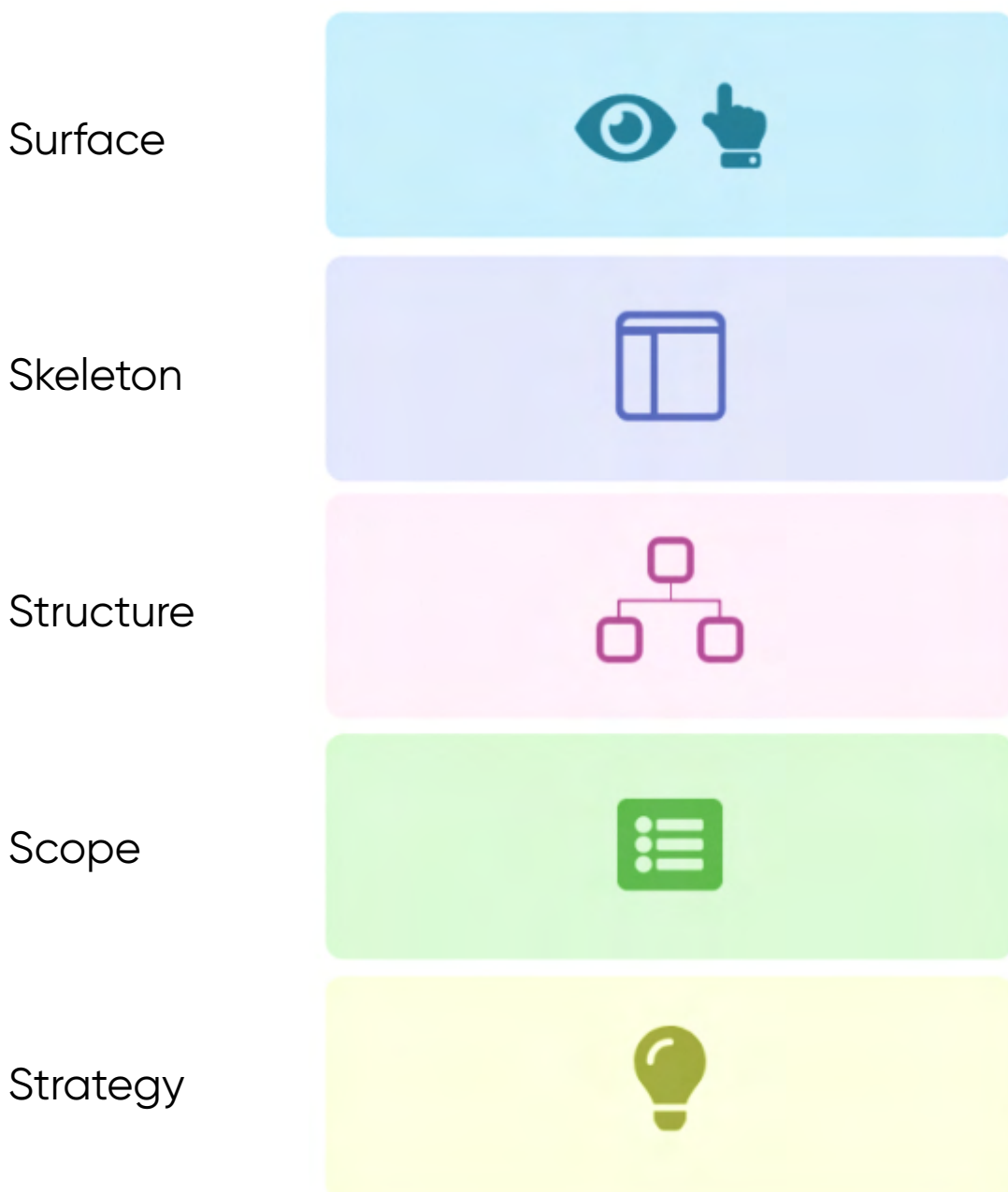
Strategy

STRATEGY

UX design begins with a clear strategic plan, outlining the user's goals, the business objectives and the overall vision of the product. It lays the foundation for the product's UX design. This also sets the direction for the entire process of UX design, guiding decisions about everything from features to functionality of the product.

SCOPE

The scope of a UX design includes deciding the functional and content requirements of the product. This refers to setting the boundaries and limitations of what will be included in the final product and what will not be. This includes defining the target audience, outlining the features and functionalities to be included and making sure any technical constraints or limitations are brought to light.

STRUCTURE

The way the content and functionality of a product is organised comes under the structure part of the UX design process. The hierarchy of information, the navigation systems and the overall flow of the user experience are decided during this stage of UX design. The goal is to provide an easy-to-use and intuitive structure that the users are looking for in the desired product or application.

SKELETON

The skeleton is the foundation upon which the rest of the UX design is built. This includes the wireframes and prototypes that outline the basic functionality and layout of the intended product. The skeleton helps the designer test and refine the UX design before moving to the final stage of the design process.

SURFACE

The surface is the final layer of a UX design that the users interact with. This includes everything from the colour schemes to typography, finalising the overall look and feel of the design. It is essential that the surface should be visually appealing and consistent with the brand's identity, while also being easy to use and intuitive. A good surface design is one that makes or breaks a product or application.
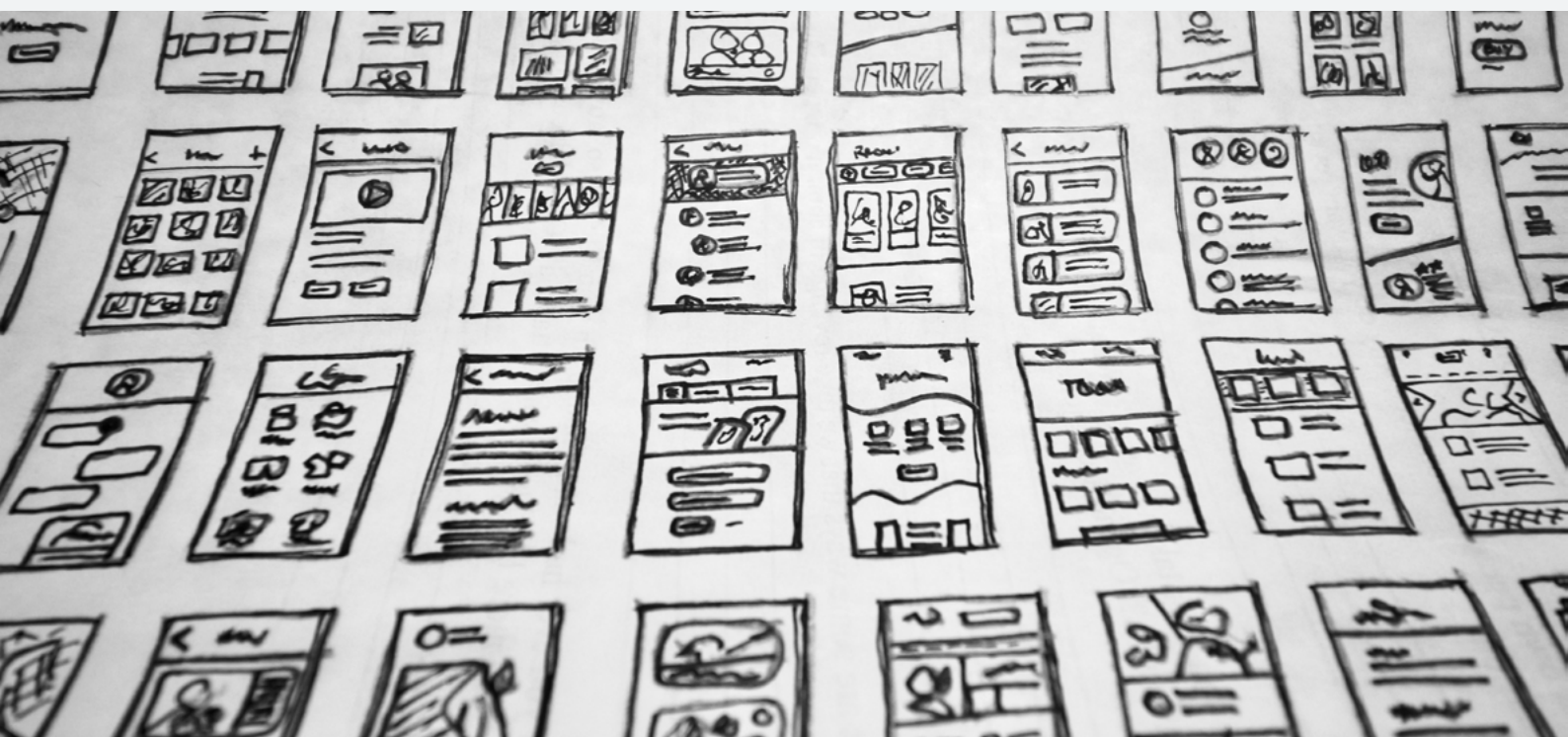
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What is UI without UX and vice versa?

A well-designed UI without good UX results in a product that looks visually pleasing but lacking in functionality and ease of use. Take, for example, The Morgan Picture Bible we discussed earlier. What if those beautiful illustrations are disarranged with no proper layout and illegible typography? Can't even imagine, right?


USER EXPERIENCE   USER INTERFACE

On the other hand, a great UX without a decent UI can result in a product that is functional but fails to engage the user emotionally. Imagine The Guardian's 'In Pictures' section just being a set of pictures with no proper typography highlighting the difference between each picture's title and description and photos varying in size and shape.

It is important to recognise the independence and interdependency of both UI and UX, since a successful product requires a fine balance of both. In brief, UI and UX are the yin and yang of a product design.
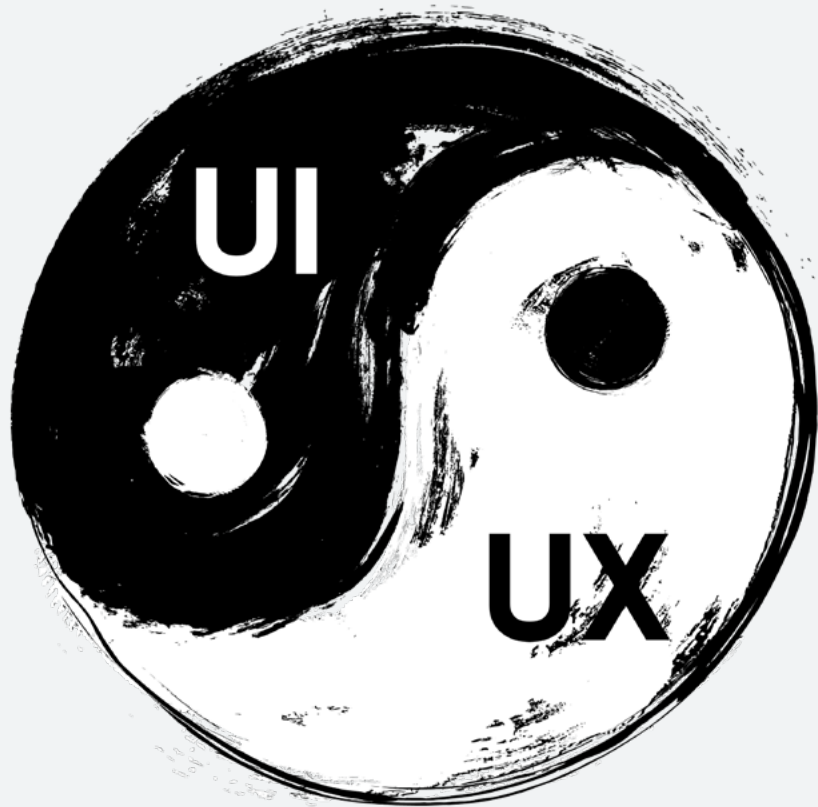
06

The Relevance of Medieval Roots in Modern UI/UX

Medieval art and design may seem like a distant, bygone era but its influence can still be seen in today's UI/UX design too. The medieval period was also a time of innovation and experimentation with what was available at that place and time. Carrying forward that innovative spirit with daring experiments has become the norm of the present digital world.

Today's designers making use of size, colour and contrast to guide users' attention to important parts of a website or application bears direct resemblances to unsaid UI/UX principles from our middle age examples. For example, the principle of visual hierarchy used in the illuminated manuscripts in the Middle Ages, highlighting important text with bold letters and ornate decorations is still relevant.

While the medieval period may seem distant and at times, to be honest, boring, with regard to modern design, its influence can never be denied. Looking into the pages of history always serves us in designing products that are visually pleasing without compromising on the intended user experience.

07
Conclusion

The world of UI/UX design is constantly evolving and staying up to date with the latest trends and technologies is a no-brainer. However, sometimes we can just pause the forward running thoughts of our brain train and have a reminiscing look at the past, medieval in our case.

From the use of clear and concise navigation to the incorporation of bold and striking visuals, medieval design principles continue to inspire modern UI/UX designers. Who knows, the medieval inspiration you might be adding subconsciously to your design (we are not asking for credits, though) might be the secret potion to spell bind this world with your designs. But never forget to keep an eye on the future, always.

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