# App Icon Evolution

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With over ten years in production, Apple had revolutionised the modern world with their touch-screen iPhones. With such cutting-edge technology at the time, there was a need for Apple to seamlessly introduce the concept to potential customers without alienating them. Thus, Apple implemented a user interface that relied on association with real-life objects and making everything feel 'physical'. So, what was the kind of design that Apple had followed for so long? Why did apple follow this specific design in the first place and why was there a shift in design philosophy over the years?

It was 2007 when Apple first released the iPhone. It was a time where analogue devices such as landline phones and CD players were the norm and the idea of a 'smart device' that essentially replaces the role of multiple technologies at once was simply inconceivable. Thus, to contextualise the variety of options available to the user, Apple utilises a form of design called 'Skeuomorphism'. Skeuomorphism is a
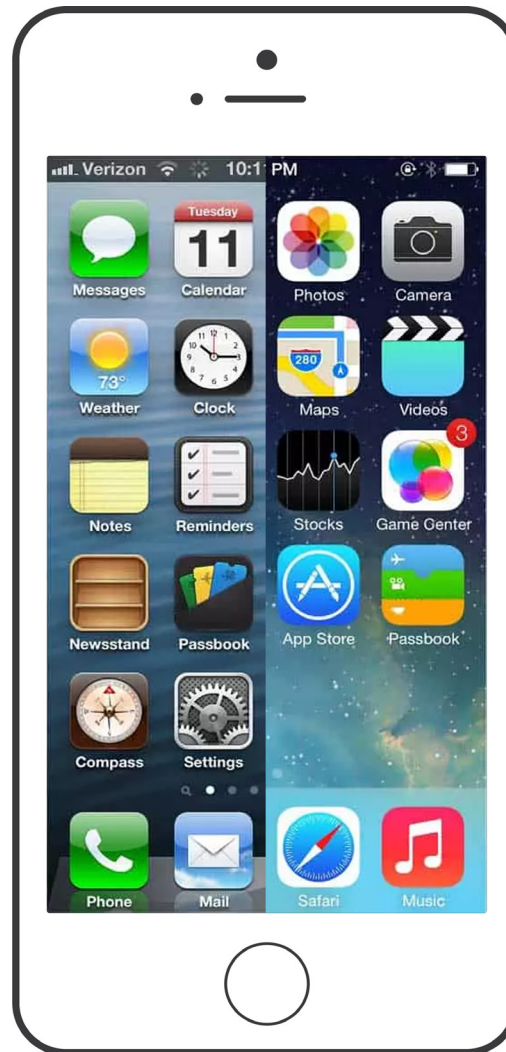
form of design in which the visuals of real-world objects as to communicate a similar function with their digital counterpart. A great example of this approach is with the look of the Camera app icon which shows a real-life camera lens in order to convey its function of taking pictures. The use of skeuomorphism allows Apple to integrate the familiarity of physical objects into the looks of their apps so that their association their real-world counterpart provides accessibility and comfortability to the user due to these imitations.

However, upon the release of iOS 7 in 2013 there was a radical shift in the look and feel of these app icons. Gone were the days of realistic shading, real-life textures, and immersive user interfaces. The new philosophy of Apple's new and now current aesthetics is Flat Design. Flat Design is a style that operates with simple two-dimensional elements and bright colours unlike Skeuomorphism which implements more three-dimensional elements. As the familiarity of Apple's iPhones had already settled in and the concept of smart devices were treated as the

norm in the public consciousness, Flat Design was used to declutter and simplify the look of these app icons so that they remain visually appealing regardless of future Apple models and their variety of screen sizes which may require the adjustment of the size of these icons in turn. Flat Design has some positives and negatives, the reduction of visual noise means that the visual experience is more optimised and streamlined, especially with the added benefit of faster loading times. But with the lack of visual cues presents a visual absence of interactivity wherein the distinction as to how certain elements operate isn't as clear as skeuomorphism which implies their function with the association to real-world objects. Hence Apple implements subtle forms of skeuomorphism such as colour gradients in order to strike a balance between visual form and visual function. An example of such is the current look of the camera app icon, which takes the form of a simple abstraction of a camera with the only element that implies depth is the light-grey to dark-grey gradient in the background.

Skeuomorphism

Flat Design

In conclusion, the design that Apple had followed at the beginning until iOS 6 was a form of skeuomorphism which is a design philosophy that borrows the visual elements of real world objects as to communicate the functionality of their digital counterparts. Skeuomorphism was implemented so that users would have a sense of familiarity of the previously cutting-edge technology which by the time iOS 7 was introduced, was no longer necessary. Apple now follows a form of Flat Design which has more abstract and simplified visual elements as to accommodate future Apple technologies and a userbase that is more than familiar with concept of smart devices.

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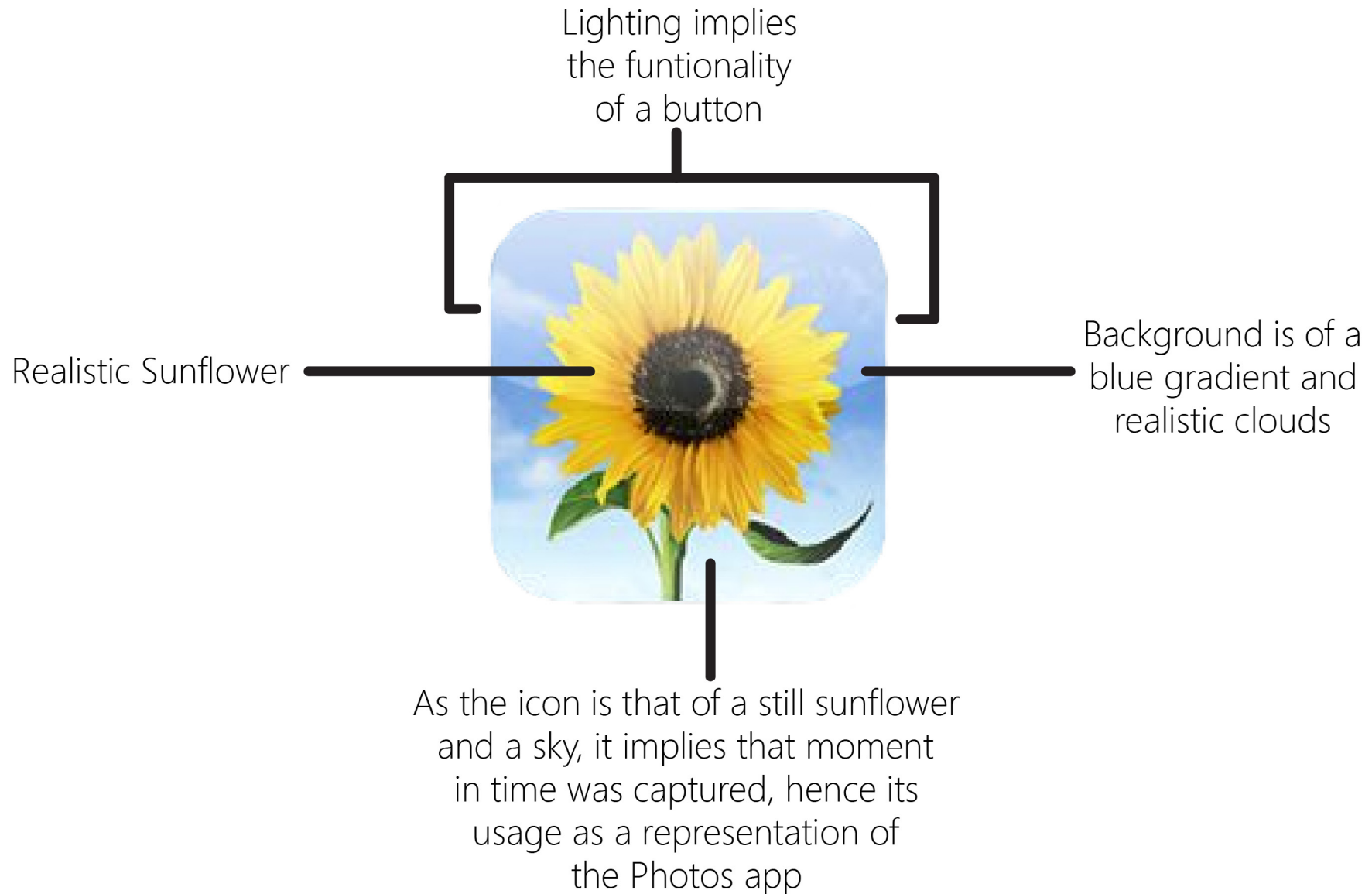What is Flat Design? (n.d.). The Interaction Design Foundation. https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/topics/flat-design

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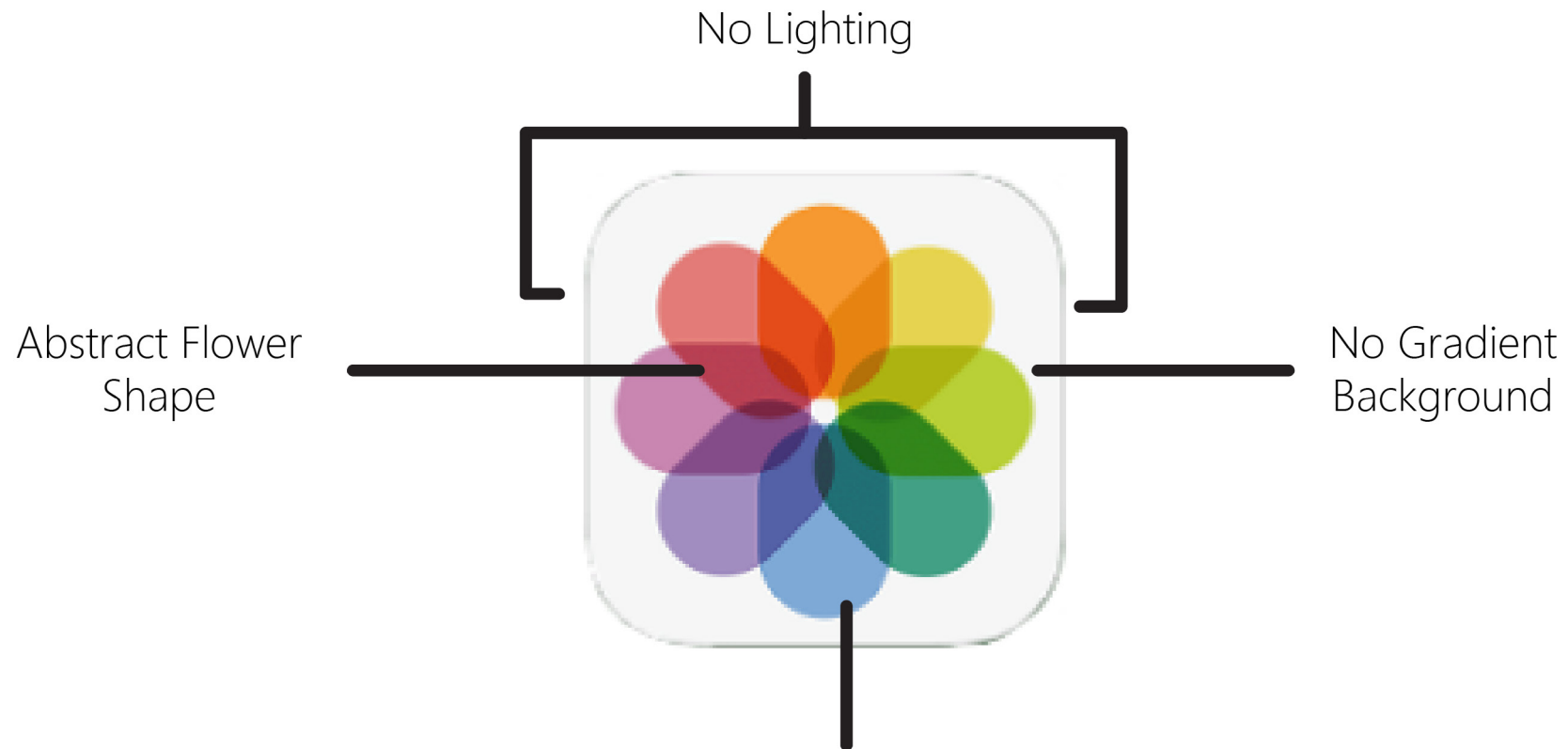
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Skeuomorphism

Lighting implies the funtionality of a button

Realistic Sunflower

Background is of a blue gradient and realistic clouds

As the icon is that of a still sunflower and a sky, it implies that moment in time was captured, hence its usage as a representation of the Photos app

Flat Design

No Lighting

Abstract Flower
Shape

No Gradient
Background

The icon is that of an abstract flower
shape which in itself is an array of
coloured shapes. With the white space
in the middle, it suggests a snapshot
of various things.