VISUAL EFFECTIVENESS OF SLOGANS
IN THE GRAPHIC DESIGN OF WAR POSTERS

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Summary

The aim of the article is to prove the hypothesis regarding the relationship between the compositional and typographic features of slogans and the visual effectiveness of war posters. The study focuses on analyzing how the graphic parameters of the textual component – font, color, size, placement, and integration into the image – affect the perception of the propagandistic message. Special attention is given to typographic techniques that enhance emotional impact, such as contrast in font choices, the dynamics of text placement, the use of decorative elements, and symbolic associations.

Both historical and contemporary examples of war-related visual communication are analyzed, allowing for an examination of the evolution of design approaches to slogan composition. The article explores the interplay between the verbal and visual components of a poster, ensuring its semantic integrity and enhancing communicative effectiveness. Emphasis is placed on techniques for creating persuasive slogans, including the use of imperative modality, symbolic metaphors, anaphoric constructions, and emotionally charged vocabulary. The study also examines the impact of propagandistic slogans on mass consciousness, particularly their ability to reinforce political and patriotic ideas. The research findings confirm that the graphic implementation of slogans not only amplifies their expressive meaning but also determines the overall character of the poster, its influence, and its effectiveness in mass communication.

Key words: poster, visual propaganda, slogan, typography, communication, wartime.

1. Introduction

The war poster is a powerful tool of mass communication, capable of rapidly and effectively influencing public consciousness. The combination of visual imagery and textual messaging ensures high emotional expressiveness and the ability to mobilize audiences toward specific actions – participation in military campaigns, support for the army, and strengthening national unity. Due to its conciseness and symbolic richness, the war poster functions as a means of political, economic, and social influence, shaping specific ideological narratives and creating clear behavioral models. Today, the war poster remains an important communication tool, but its greatest impact was observed in the 20th century, during the world wars, the Cold War, and national liberation movements, when it served as a key mobilization instrument by combining simplicity, accessibility, and high emotional expressiveness. In the 21st century, the informational landscape has changed significantly with the advent of digital technologies and social media, which have greatly expanded the possibilities of propaganda and visual agitation. The modern war poster is evolving, adapting to the multimedia environment, particularly in the form of digital images, animation, and video formats. However, its core functions – mobilization, emotional impact, and the formation of ideological narratives – remain unchanged, even

though digital propaganda surpasses it in scale and immediacy. The effectiveness of the war poster is based on visual simplicity, emotional resonance, and instant impact, which are especially crucial in the context of information warfare and propaganda campaigns. In this regard, the role of the slogan becomes decisive, as it provides the image with a meaningful framework, directing the viewer's interpretation in the intended direction.

The purpose of the study is to determine the role of slogans in the formation of a propaganda message in a war poster from the standpoint of graphic design. The objectives of the study are to analyze the functions and features of slogans in the structure of a war poster as a communication tool; to determine the typology of slogans in war poster graphics; to investigate the principles of typographic and compositional design of slogans in a war poster; to consider the interaction of text and visual components in creating an effective propaganda message; to trace the evolution of the use of slogans in war poster graphics of the 20th – 21st centuries; to determine the key techniques for enhancing the impact of slogans by means of graphic design. The hypothesis of the study is the assumption that the effectiveness of a propaganda poster largely depends on the compositional, typographical and semantic construction of its slogan.

2. Material and methods of research

The empirical basis of the study is made up of samples of war posters of the 20th – 21st centuries, which were used in various historical and political contexts. Particular attention is paid to poster products containing expressive slogans that play a key role in the formation of the propaganda message. The study uses the method of visual-stylistic analysis to study the graphic construction of a war poster; the method of semiotic analysis to consider the symbolic system of slogans in interaction with the graphic elements of the poster, determining their role in the formation of ideological and emotional impact; content analysis to identify key thematic and rhetorical techniques in the text component of posters; comparative analysis to compare posters of different historical periods, identify trends in design changes and the role of slogans in propaganda communication; a cognitive-communicative approach to assess the effectiveness of the impact of slogans on the audience and the mechanisms of their perception by the visual culture of different eras. The use of a comprehensive approach allowed us to comprehensively investigate the interaction of text and image in a war poster and identify key patterns that ensure the effectiveness of its propaganda message.

3. Analysis of the latest research and publications

Visual messages of posters in the context of the First and Second World Wars, civil wars and revolutions are examined by researchers O. Maievskyi (2016), L. Pytlovana (2016), S. Luckert and S. Bakhrah (2009). Visual propaganda and agitation forms of war posters from the position of military and political expediency are studied by Ukrainian researchers I. Tsynkovska and G. Yukhymets (2004), L. Legasova (2009), I. Koliyada (2012) and others. War propaganda using the example of British posters of the First World War period is studied by T. Perga and T. Shevchuk (2017). P. Paret and B. Lewis (1992), J. Aulich (2007) study the poster from the position of political military context and propaganda. The Ukrainian political war poster was examined by L. Legasova (2009), O. Gladun (2018), O. Zalevska (2023). The question of the role of slogans in the formation of a propaganda message in a war poster from the perspective of graphic design has not yet become the subject of a separate study.

4. Typology of slogans in war posters

Visual communication plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion, especially during military conflicts, where the effectiveness of informational influence has strategic significance. The war poster is one of the most powerful means of mass communication, combining imagery and text to create an emotionally charged and persuasive message. At the core of such a poster lies the slogan – a verbal component that defines or summarizes the central idea and directs the ideological message. A slogan is a concise expression of an idea, political demand, or call to action (Dictionary. Ukrainian Culture Portal). Its function extends beyond mere information delivery; it serves as a motivational tool capable of evoking specific emotions and prompting action from the audience. Thus, the success of a propaganda poster largely depends on the typographic and compositional parameters of the slogan, which ensure its expressiveness and effectiveness.

Slogans in war posters can be classified based on the type of linguistic influence: imperative, informative, motivational, symbolic, and metaphorical.

The imperative type of slogans uses the command mood, directly addressing the mass consciousness with the goal of urging active action. These calls are clear, concise, and highly impactful. For example, «Remember the Alamo!» *(USA, 1836)* – a call used during the Texas Revolution (1835–1836) to remind people of the heroic defense of the Alamo Fort. «I want you for U.S. Army» *(USA, 1917)* – a classic imperative slogan from the poster featuring Uncle Sam, urging Americans to join the army during World War I. «Your country needs YOU!» *(UK, 1914)* – a famous call to the British, featured on the poster with Lord Kitchener. «Come on, Canada!» *(Canada, 1942)* – an imperative slogan encouraging Canadians to join the military forces during World War I (Canadian War Museum). «Join the Army – Defend Australia!» *(Australia, 1940)* – a call to Australians to mobilize for the Australian Armed Forces during World War II (Australian War Memorial). An analysis of posters reveals that imperative slogans are typically accompanied by dynamic compositional solutions – large, bold letters, contrasting colors (red, black, white), and swift lines in the illustrations. This helps create a sense of urgency and stimulates the emotional state of the viewer.

Informative and motivational slogans are aimed at boosting morale, explaining the situation, and strengthening the ideological message. They are typically formulated in affirmative or encouraging forms. For example, the «Keep Calm and Carry On» *(UK, 1939)* poster conveys a calming message intended to boost the morale of the British during World War II. The iconic motivational poster by J. G. Miller featuring Rosie the Riveter with the slogan «We Can Do It!» *(USA, 1943)* encouraged women to work in the military industries. The slogan «United We Stand» *(USA, 1942)* emphasized the unity of Americans in their fight against the enemy. «Victory is in sight!» *(UK, 1944)* was an encouraging slogan highlighting the imminent victory in World War II. The slogan from the «Give us the tools, and we will finish the job» *(UK, 1941)* poster called on allies to provide military aid *(Aulich, 2007)*. These slogans are often complemented by heroic imagery, symbols of victory (flags, sun, raised fists, happy faces), and the typographic solutions are contrasting but balanced and visually calm.

Symbolic slogans use allegories, metaphors, historical and cultural symbols that evoke associative connections and amplify emotional impact. For example, the «We are the Marines. The Few. The Proud» *(USA, 1977)* slogan for the U.S. Marine Corps is a metaphorical expression that emphasizes the elitism and honor of military service. «Loose Lips Sink Ships» (UK/USA, 1942) is an allegorical warning about the danger of information leaks during wartime. «Give me liberty, or give me death!» *(Patrick Henry, USA, 1775)* is a revolutionary

call that symbolizes the fight for freedom and was frequently used in wartime posters of the 20th century. «Lest We Forget» *(UK, 1919)* is a line from Rudyard Kipling's poem that became a symbol of remembrance for those who died in wars. Symbolic and metaphorical slogans are often accompanied by epic imagery (warriors, swords, the sun, flags), emphasizing the high content level of the message. The fonts may be stylized to resemble historical or handwritten scripts, which adds authenticity.

5. Visual and graphic representation of slogans in wartime posters

The analysis of posters shows that the typographic design of slogans plays a key role in their visual effectiveness and audience perception. The choice of font, size, weight, and color not only determines the aesthetic appearance of the text but also its emotional and ideological impact. Bold, heavy typefaces (grotesques, slab serifs) symbolize strength, firmness, determination, and formality. They are often used in posters calling for action or showcasing military power. Gothic and sharply contrasting fonts are associated with authority, threat, or drama, emphasizing the urgency of the situation. Such fonts were often used in Nazi posters. Handwritten and calligraphic fonts add individuality to the slogan, evoking a sense of personal appeal or patriotic devotion. They can be used in motivational and symbolic slogans. Decorative fonts refer to national or military symbolism, providing the poster with a cultural context. Font size determines the priority of the text on the poster and its ability to attract attention. For instance, large letters (capitals, extended font size) give the slogan dominance, making it perceived as the key element. Lowercase letters or smaller text sizes are used for clarifying information or enhancing the contrast between the main slogan and supplementary text. Bold text creates an impression of persuasion, strength, and confidence. The thicker the font, the more dominant it is in the visual space of the poster. Italicized fonts add dynamism to the text, associating it with movement and action, emphasizing emotional tension. Color is also a powerful tool of emotional influence in visual communication, and when combined with typography, it significantly amplifies the semantic weight of the slogan.

6. Compositional interaction of text and image in wartime posters

The composition of the slogan in a wartime poster determines its visual effectiveness and ability to influence the audience. The text and image must work as a unified communicative mechanism, enhancing the main message. The placement, scale, and integration of the slogan into the composition determine how well the viewer will perceive its content *(Meggs, 1998)*. If the slogan is placed at the center, top, or middle of the poster, it creates emphasis and ensures quick readability (in posters like «Join the Army!» and «We Can Do It!», the text is the first thing the viewer notices). Text placed at the top works as a headline, immediately grabbing attention. It is often used in combination with the lower placement of the image, creating a «hierarchical» order of perception («Keep Calm and Carry On»). The lower placement of the slogan enhances the image and is used when the primary visual emphasis is on the illustration. The slogan acts as a caption, explaining or complementing the image, and often accompanies symbolic or emotionally charged scenes, where the image speaks for itself. The slogan can be integrated into dynamic elements of the poster (e.g., on a flag, in beams of light, etc.). The slant of the text adds a sense of tension, speed, and urgency. The effect of rupture or distortion may emphasize chaos, struggle, or danger («Loose Lips Might Sink Ships» – the text is placed in a dynamic, slanted format, conveying a sense of threat).

The slogan is not just a textual message but a visual-graphic element that interacts with color, shape, composition, and symbolism. The use of contrast, typographic solutions, and visual symbols enhances propagandistic effectiveness, making the message clear, powerful, and instantly recognizable. Contrast is one of the most powerful graphic tools in wartime propaganda. It provides not only readability but also psychological impact, making the slogan highly noticeable and emotionally charged *(Meggs, 1998).* Important are color contrast, contrast of shape and scale, which add dynamics and expression, forcing the viewer to pause and focus. Typographic expression is also an important means of emotional influence. The font and its styling directly influence how the slogan is perceived – whether it sounds imperative, trustworthy, or prompts action. Heavy fonts convey decisiveness, strength, and discipline. Handwritten fonts add a personal touch, enhancing emotional tension. The rhythm and structure of the text, breaking the slogan into short lines, create the effect of a chant, making the viewer read the text step by step, absorbing each phrase separately. A common technique is the repetition of certain words, which seems to amplify a hypnotic influence (e.g., «Fight! Fight! Fight the enemy!»). The use of exclamation marks or questions adds imperative force, while ellipses create a sense of anticipation or threat.

Symbolism in the graphic design of wartime posters helps to instantly convey the ideological message and enhances the content of the slogan. Fonts that mimic stencil printing are associated with military equipment, weapons, and ammunition. This creates a sense of combat atmosphere and discipline. The stylization of trench writings or graffiti adds a sense of reality, depicting an actual combat environment, a call from soldiers to the people. The symbolic meaning of the combination of national flag colors in the text of the poster enhances patriotic emotions, reminds of national identity, and is frequently used in posters from various military conflicts. Typography of slogans stylized after historical artifacts (engraving, ornaments) can be used to reference historical events and amplify ideological significance.

The typographic design of slogans in wartime poster graphics follows the principles of visual rhetoric, aimed at intensifying both the content and emotional impact. The choice of font, its size, contrast, color scheme, and the integration of text into the overall composition of the image create a cohesive graphic narrative that strengthens the propagandistic effect.

7. Conclusions

The analysis of wartime posters demonstrates that slogans play a key role in shaping the ideological, motivational, and emotional impact on the audience. They can be informative, encouraging, or symbolic, using metaphors, historical allusions, and cultural associations to enhance the message. The typographic design of slogans is no less important in determining their effectiveness. The choice of font, style, color, and compositional layout determines how convincingly and emotionally the text is perceived. Contrast, scale, and the interaction of text with imagery ensure immediate attention, enhance the emotional impact, and reinforce the ideological direction of the poster. Bold, heavy fonts symbolize strength and determination, Gothic fonts add drama, while handwritten fonts convey personal appeal and patriotic devotion. The composition of the text also influences the effectiveness of the slogan; its placement, dynamics, and visual integration with the image determine how quickly and effectively the viewer perceives the main message. Thus, a wartime poster is not just a carrier of information but a powerful visual-communication tool, where text, color, symbolism, and composition work as a unified mechanism to achieve the maximum propagandistic effect.

This study is the first to comprehensively analyze the relationship between the typographic design of slogans and their ideological and emotional functions in wartime posters.

Special attention is given to the visual means of enhancing the content, particularly the choice of font, its compositional arrangement, and integration with graphic elements. Promising directions for further research include comparative analysis of wartime posters from different countries in the context of typography as a tool of visual communication, as well as studying the evolution of typographic style in military propaganda of the 21st centuries, particularly under the influence of digital technologies.

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