

STUDY ON ACHIEVING A GOOD DESIGN FOR A BOOK COVER

Abstract: This paper is focused to analyze a book cover using principles of advertising design, namely: conception unity, structure harmony, reception order, composition balance, contrast and hierarchy of information. The authors consider that a book cover is an advertisement because it has to realize the AIDA concept. It is about graphic design where the image and the title have an important role in selling a book. The target of the study (only a part of it is in the paper) was to answer to a few questions which will be defined in this paper. In our study we have identified a lot of different cover designs used by various publishing houses. We have analyzed the impact of colours, typography and scale to create order, balance and hierarchy to an adequate cover.

Key words: book cover, title, image, graphic representation, advertising design, conception unity.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is a challenge to design a good book cover using words, colours, images. It is about a special work because it means a lot of information concerning principles, methods, drawings, graphics and more others. When someone is going into a library or bookshop sees a lot of book covers and he/she could be focused just to a few of them. The design of a book cover is like an advertisement which is related to AIDA (attention, interest, desire and action). Our study has to answer to a few questions: What is important, the title or the image? About the image: drawn out of the story or something abstract?; What is the impact of colours, typography and scale to create order, balance and hierarchy?; What about the graphic representation: real, stylized (abstract) or arbitrary? These questions have been our start point in this research.

2. ABOUT THE PRINCIPLES USED IN BOOK COVER DESIGN

The graphic design "triangle" is about 3 important elements: concept, composition and colour. By using in an intelligent and creative way of these elements, it is possible to design interesting book covers. There is no magic formula to design an excellent book cover. It is about the experience of the designer to do the best in this work.

The *concept* is the basement of the design, is the vision behind it. The *composition* means a relationship between components, factors which are involved in harmony or disharmony, symmetry or asymmetry concerning the structure. For a cover, it's so important the connection between image and words (title, text). "Colour is the lifeblood of graphic design" [1]. To understand the message and the psychology of colours on a book cover is very important to suit any design project. Because a book cover speaks generally in images and colours. In our research study we have seen how appropriate were the advertising design principles related to book cover design.

The *conception unity principle* is about an unitary project that includes all the elements (text, symbols, images, title, colours etc.). The *structure harmony principle* speaks about the compatibility between elements and the arrangement of them to drive the eyes of a viewer in a well thinking tide sequence. The *reception order principle* (coherence reception) is tied to the possibility to read a cover from left to right or from up to down easily. It is about to design a way for a right reception of the message. The *composition balance* and the *contrast principles* have to design an harmonious arrangement between components and to assure a hierarchy of visual information [3].

To realize a good book cover the designer has to solve a lot of challenges: what is the position of elements into the layout or what is the scale of each element to obtain a high visual impact; which element is driving the composition, the title or the image; in what way it is possible to create the representation tension; is it better to use same elements more times; what is the style of the image (realist, allusive, fictional, analytic, metaphorical, simple, complex).

3. A FEW STEPS IN BOOK COVER DESIGN

A designer who wants to create good book cover has to know the concept of *Design Thinking*, that means: thinking in words, in shape, in colours, in symbols, in images, in proportion.

It is very important because all these elements have to be useful together to realize a message. For a designer is necessary to communicate something not to decorate, every detail means message.

For him, all components have to talk the same language to create a visual harmony. We have proposed 5 steps to design a book cover [2].

About the *first step*. There is a question: Is it necessary to read or not the text of the book to be able to design a good book cover? Many times the designers read the book to understand the message and what symbols, images and text should be. In our research study we have analyzed a lot of books and we have realized that the image, the title and the text were

appropriate for the book. Of course the designer is not obliged to choose an image concerning the text, but for literature books, we have identified images from the story. This is the first step to create a visual image in her / his mind. That means: *have a concept*.

The second step is about sketching. That means to translate this visual image into drawings as sketches, to realize the desired message. It is about symbols, signs, images or illustrations, drawings and text, all together in a composition structure. In this stage is important to focus on what matters, what kind of picture will be. If the designer has in her / his mind a library of images is important to select the right picture.

The third step is about colour/colours. That means to choose colours according to the purpose and create a kind of order to convey the message. It is known that colours affects visual hierarchy and a colour code is necessary to make an information hierarchy. The colours have the ability to convey suggestions and to create a special atmosphere.

The fourth step is tied to typography. This is important to create order and to convey information, from most to least. It is very important to realize before you start the hierarchy of information.

Because this is a start point to use different font for various information. For the designer is very important to use typography to make audience to navigate as easy as possible a layout.

The fifth step is about the connection of the four steps to create the final graphic representation. The scale of representation to announce something is very important and it will be used to indicate the importance value. The designer has to realize a concept by using colour coding, image coding, typography coding. This step is final and the result has to be presented.

4. CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY

In our research study we have selected a few books to evaluate in what way the principles and the rules of design were implemented concerning book covers.

These books have been edited in Romanian language (Romanian Publishing Houses). It was so interesting because we have seen differences from a designer to another, for different publishing houses.

We have noticed a difference concerning the fonts for title, various structure and composition of the layout, a special use of wheel of colours, and realistic, allusive or fictional images which made reference to the story of the book. All the book covers had images.

It is known that on a book cover a viewer has to see: title, author, image (usually), text (e.g. novel, tales, poetry, the author was honored with The Nobel Prize for Literature, some words - maybe one phrase about the impact of the book or he/she is the author of the bestseller...etc.), the publishing house.

As we have seen, all these selected and analyzed books had these elements in their book cover structure.

In figure 1 we have drawn a few examples concerning the composition and the structure of a book cover.

The layout of the cover is about the structure, that means how many levels are necessary to put together title, writer's name, colours, image, text, publishing house (PH on drawings).

We have analyzed only 15 book covers in this paper concerning the structure and composition and for one of them we have proposed another design for the cover.

First, we have noticed a connection between image, title and the story.

In Figure 1a the title is *Invitation to scaffold* (Vladimir Nabokov) and an ax stuck in a log is the image.

The book cover for *To Whom the Bell Tolls* (Ernest Hemingway) represents a few bells (Figure 1b). It is a story about a young American who was fighting in the International Brigade in The Civil War in Spain.

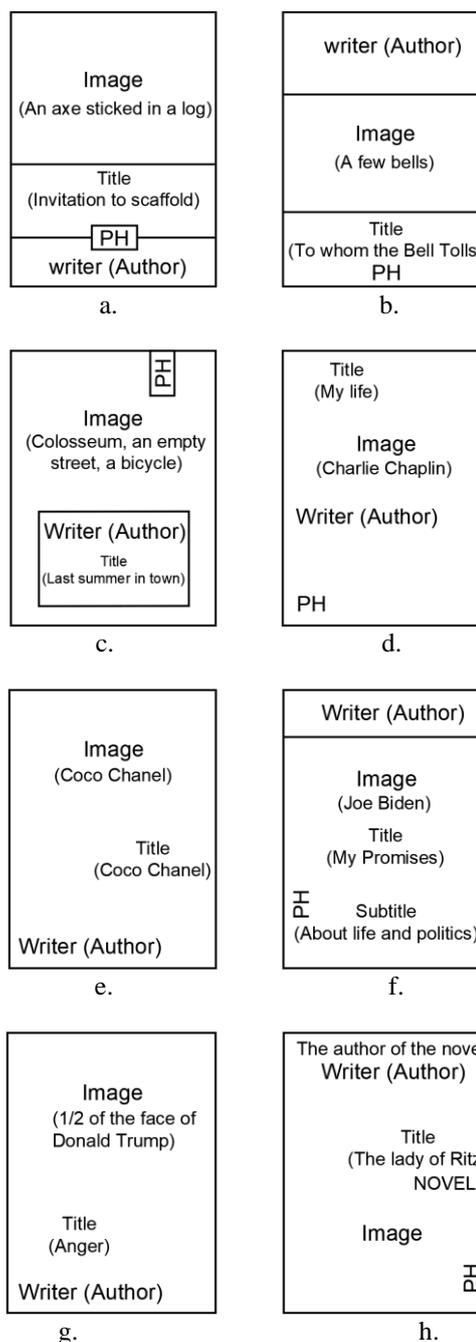


Figure 1 Examples of composition and structure for a cover.

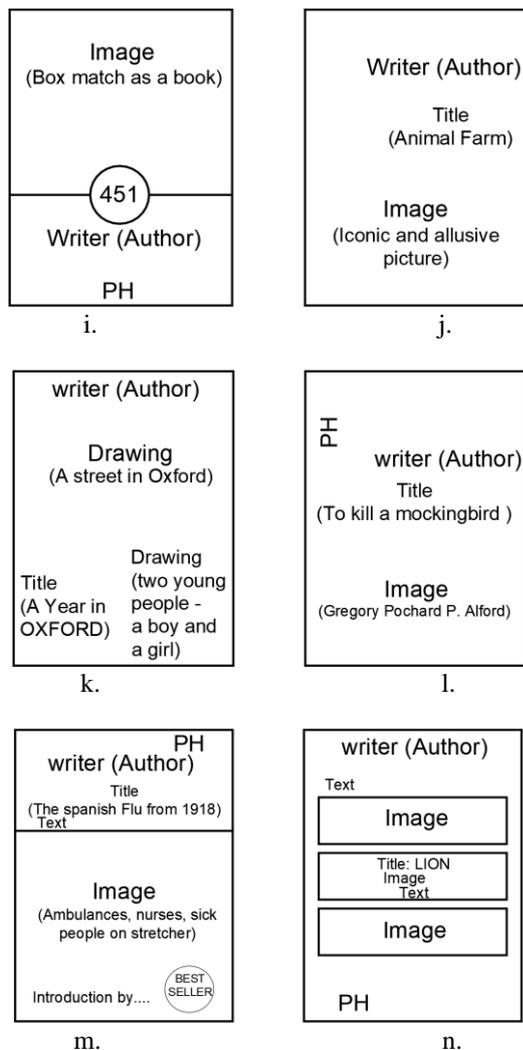


Figure 1 Examples of composition and structure for a cover.

For *Last summer in town* (Gianfranco Calligaris) the Colosseum image speaks about a story in Rome in 1960. It is a special image full of light (the sun is shining), nobody in the streets, a lonely bicycle in close-up and the Colosseum behind (Figure 1c). In other covers (Figure 1d, e, f) we have seen another approach from the designer. He has represented on the whole cover the image of the character of the book (Coco Chanel, Charlie Chaplin, Joe Biden) and the title of each book is the name of each character. Only for the cover (Figure 1g) Donald Trump is represented a half of the head, and the title is *The Anger* (Bob Woodward), not his name. About images, we have seen realistic (Figure 1b, c, d, e, f, g, l), allusive and fictional (Figure 1j), symbolic (Figure 1a). An interesting cover was for the book *A Year at Oxford* (Julia Wehlan). For this cover the designer has chosen to draw two people, a young girl and a boy in close-up and behind them has drawn a picture of a well-known building in Oxford. All the dramatic action is happened in Oxford and the image is very suggestive (Figure 1k). *Fahrenheit 451* (Ray Bradbury) has a metaphorical design on the cover: the image of a book as a matchbox (Figure 1i). During our study it was interesting to find covers having as image very known actors from Hollywood. The cover of the book *To Kill a*

Mockingbird (Harper Lee) has an image of Gregory Peck and the young boy Phillip Alford. It is the image from the movie with the same title, from 1962 (Figure 1l). For the book cover *The Lady from Ritz* (Melanie Benjamin) the designer has chosen an interesting image which is in the way of the story (Figure 1h). For the book *The Spanish Flu from 1918*, the image on cover is very representative: ambulances, nurses and sick people, all together in a dramatic picture (Figure 1m). The image for *The Animals Farm* (George Orwell) is ironic and allusive. It is about an oppressive regime, especial communist (Figure 1j). The book cover *Lion, The way to home* (Saroo Brierley), is structured in 3 equal parts to express the true story of the book (Figure 1n).

In our research we have noticed many examples of covers when the title was written above the image (Figure 1 d, e, g, h, n). Another interesting observation was about the typography and difference from a cover to another as regards font and colours of the letters. We have seen capitals, hand writing and special writing, as well, for title and name of the writer.

5. ANALYSIS OF A BOOK COVER

In this paper we have presented an analysis of the cover from the book *Félix and the invisible spring* (Figure 2), by Eric Emmanuel Schmitt. We have seen 4 covers (Figure 3) as follows: 1 is the main cover, 2 and 4 are interior covers, 3 is the back cover. The second cover presents the writer and the name of other novels written by him.

The fourth cover presents an abstract about the story and the name of novels which have appeared at the same publishing house. The third cover has a photo of the writer and a few assessments appeared in some newspapers.

First, we have read the book to understand what are the best symbols and images, which may be used on cover. Shortly, the story is this: from Senegal have arrived in Paris a woman, called Fatou and her boy, Felix, and after a few years she had a coffee house well known in Bellville neighborhood, called AU TRAVAIL. But the balance of their life is affected in a day when Fatou became like a shadow, without energy and future plans. After a few failure trials has appeared a chance: to go back to Senegal, to link the broken bonds between she and Africa. Reading the story, the designer has pictured something iconic for Paris and Senegal: The Eiffel Tower and The Baobab tree. So, for the cover the image is composed on 3 plans: the first one (front) - Fatou in a traditional wear and her son; the second one (middle) - the baobab and the third one (behind) - the Eiffel Tower. The designer has chosen a yellow colour for the cover to express the sun of Africa and the expectations for a better life. Starting from this cover we have tried to sketch two graphic representations concerning this story using illustration or abstract/stylized graphics. In Figure 4 we have represented two important things in Fatou's life: the coffee house and a small part of her village in Senegal. The structure is divided in two equal parts, one for France and one for Senegal. In Figure 5 it is an abstract graphic representation (Eiffel Tower and a baobab).



Figure 2 Graphic representation of the book cover.

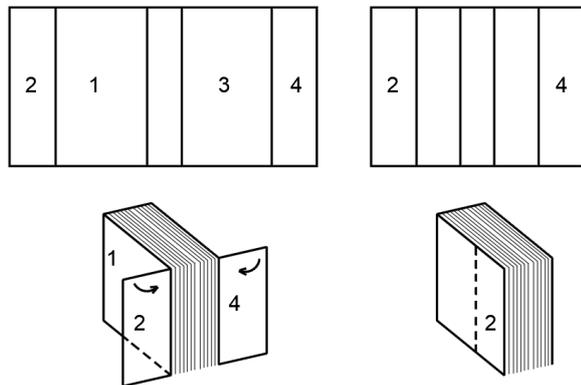


Figure 3 The position of the four covers of the book.

We have drawn another structure having the same message. It was very important to create, by using icons, the feeling which is captured in this book.

The drawings of figure 4 have tried to realize the connection between different cultures, to put face to face an interesting perception of life. We have analyzed what is the best graphic representation for this purpose. All the sketches about the subject offered to us the possibility to understand what drawing is the most representative to design a special book cover.



Figure 4



Figure 5

In this paper we have presented only two sketches about the cover because we are sure that this is an important step in the process of creating covers. But we have been focused only on the main cover (number 1 in figure), not on the others.

6.CONCLUSIONS

This paper has followed to present an important domain of the graphic design, namely the book cover. Using the principles of design and the elements as symbols, images, colours and words, a designer may realize wonderful *piece of art* on a cover. We have shown only a few graphic representations and we are focused to pay attention further on to this interesting field of creation. Our research is at the beginning and we are sure that graphic design has a great future in Digital Age of 21 century.

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