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NEGATIVE SPACE IN POSTER DESIGN: APPLICATION FEATURES

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Abstract. *The study focuses on the methods of using negative space in poster design and aims to identify key principles of using negative space to create illusions, balance and focus, as well as to develop recommendations for practicing designers. The article reveals how negative space affects the psychological perception of posters, contributing to better memorization of information and emotional engagement of the audience. In addition, a comparative analysis of traditional and modern poster design was carried out, in order to determine the evolution of the use of negative space in historical and cultural aspects.*

Purpose. *The purpose of the study is a comprehensive analysis of the features of the use of negative space in poster design, with an emphasis on its role in the formation of visual harmony, strengthening the message and adaptation to different contexts.*

Methodology. *The study is based on a combination of theoretical and empirical methods. An analysis of scientific literature was conducted, including classic works on graphic design and modern journals on visual communication. Qualitative methods, such as semiotic analysis, were used to uncover the symbolic meaning of negative space, as well as quantitative methods, such as statistical analysis of data on design effectiveness (readability, gaze fixation time). Tools included visual modeling software such as Adobe Illustrator to create experimental poster prototypes.*

Results. *The study found that negative space in poster design is not a passive element, but an active tool for creating visual illusions, such as forming hidden shapes or emphasizing key elements. In particular, in marketing posters, its use increases attention by promoting a better balance between text and image. In social advertising, negative space enhances emotional impact, allowing the audience to «draw» the message in their imagination. Four main features were identified: 1) micro- and macro-levels (small space between elements vs. large background); 2) color variations (not only white, but also colored negative space); 3) integration with typography to improve readability; 4) adaptation to digital formats, where limited space requires minimalism. Experiments have shown that posters with optimal negative space (30–50% of the area) have higher efficiency compared to crowded designs. Practical recommendations have been developed, including a space balancing algorithm for beginners.*

Scientific novelty. *The novelty lies in the development of a classification of negative space types specifically for poster design, taking into account cultural characteristics (for example, integration with ornaments). For the first time, a model*

of the psychological impact of negative space based on Gestalt principles, adapted to modern media, is proposed. The study expands the theoretical base by introducing the concept of «dynamic negative space» for interactive posters, which was not sufficiently covered in previous works. This contributes to the development of graphic design as a scientific discipline in Ukraine and China.

Practical relevance. The results of the study have direct application in the professional activities of graphic designers, allowing to optimize the process of creating posters to increase their effectiveness in real campaigns. The use of negative space in poster design contributes to the creation of more attractive materials that increase conversion and audience engagement. The practical significance lies in providing tools to increase the competitiveness of graphic designers in the international market, where minimalism and efficiency are key trends.

Keywords: Negative Space, Poster Design, Graphic Design, Visual Communication, White Space, Visual Hierarchy, Gestalt Principles, Minimalism in Design, Emotional Impact, Readability, Cultural Aspects, Digital Design, Poster Semiotics, Compositional Balance, Illusions in Design.

INTRODUCTION

In the digital intelligence era, the media for information dissemination are becoming increasingly diversified. As an important form of visual communication, posters occupy an irreplaceable key position, whether in the traditional print media field or in the digital information transmission platform. As an efficient publicity tool, posters aim to attract the attention of the audience and accurately convey specific information or emotions with a unique visual language [3].

Among the many elements of poster design, the concept of negative space has gradually received extensive attention. Negative space usually refers to the gap area between different design elements in a poster [20]. It not only undertakes the basic functions of dividing different design elements, constructing the overall composition and planning the distribution of elements, but also, from a new design perspective, actively integrates into the creative concept of poster design. Although negative space is often overlooked due to its «invisible» characteristics, it is a core link in laying the foundation for high-quality design [11; 14]. In recent years, with the continuous innovation and development of global design concepts, its importance has gradually been recognized by designers. Negative space is by no means just a simple blank area, but a core element that coexists with positive space, interacts with each other, and jointly constructs the overall visual effect of the poster [6].

ANALYSIS OF RECENT RESEARCH

As a core element in graphic design, negative space has in recent years sparked multidisciplinary and multi-dimensional research in

the field of poster design [20]. The functional value of negative space is the focus of this research. K. Polasik argued that negative space is not just visual whitespace but a form of «visual grammar» [4]. By controlling the distance and proportion between elements, it can direct viewers' attention and enhance the hierarchy of information. For example, in academic posters, negative space strengthens the separation of content through techniques such as cutting and shading [1]. In advertising posters, negative space simplifies visual noise to improve brand recognition efficiency [7]. Berg and Hicks [2] further pointed out that negative space forms a dynamic balance with color and typography, acting as an irreplaceable «implicit framework» in professional poster design. The «active whitespace» of negative space can also evoke viewers' associations through visual illusions, such as reversed graphics [12]. Research on negative space has expanded from the realm of traditional aesthetics into the intersections of cognitive science, cultural studies, and digital technology. However, the theoretical framework for functional innovation of negative space still needs to be further developed to transform it from «passive whitespace» into a tool for «active storytelling».

PURPOSE

This research aims to deeply analyze the application methods of negative space in poster design, systematically explore its functional characteristics in the information transmission process, and its important role in improving the quality and effect of poster design. By studying the area, shape and color of negative space in poster design, it provides designers with more practical design strategies and ideas, helping

them to create poster works with more visual attraction and emotional appeal.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Negative space, essentially, is the space between objects. The famous British sculptor Rachel Whiteread once made the abstract concept of negative space concrete through a sculpture work. She made a mold of the space under the chair, truly presenting the spatial form that people are accustomed to in daily life but hardly notice. In an intuitive and vivid way, she explained the concept of negative space to the audience and guided people to interpret things from a new perspective.

In the context of modern design, the role of negative space has been more widely recognized and applied. Designers have gradually realized that negative space can not only balance the composition of the picture and guide the viewer's line of sight, but also convey deep meanings and emotions [16]. It provides designers with a broad creative space, helping them break through the shackles of traditional thinking and construct a wonderful space where positive space and negative space coexist and complement each other through ingenious coincidences, associations and fictional techniques [10].

Influence and Application of the Area of Negative Space. When the area of negative space is small, its main function is to divide the entire composition. Like an invisible line, it ensures the harmonious spatial relationship between text and graphics, text and text, and graphics and graphics in the picture [5].

For example, in text layout, the negative space between lines can create an appropriate line spacing, making the text more readable and the visual effect more comfortable. In poster design, making the negative space present regularity and rhythm can endow the poster picture with formal beauty. For example, in the poster design works of American graphic designer Paula Scher (for example, Fig. 1), negative space is used in a large number and regularly in the form of dividing lines, which not only realizes the basic function of dividing text and graphics, but also endows the picture with a unique formal beauty. When the area of negative space is large, it can create a strong visual effect and create creative and artistic design works. White space, a common design technique, is a typical representative of the large – scale use of negative space and is widely used in poster design. By increasing the proportion of negative space in the entire poster and correspondingly reducing the area of the main content (positive space), a sharp visual contrast can be formed, enhancing the visual impact. The purpose of white space is to guide the viewer's line of sight to focus on the theme elements of the poster, highlight the visual center, and set off the theme atmosphere. Skillfully using white space can make the main image and the blank part complement each other, achieving a design aesthetic of the coexistence of the virtual and the real and a profound artistic conception. However, it should be noted that if white space exists only for the sake of form and lacks a clear purpose of information transmission, it may make the work seem incomplete and a waste of space. Therefore, in the



Fig. 1. Poster Design Works of American Graphic Designer Paula Scher

actual design process, negative space and positive space must be considered as a whole and conceived in a coordinated manner [19]. For example, the promotional poster designed by Japanese designer Kenya Hara for Muji skillfully uses the white space technique, giving full play to the minimalist style (for example, Fig. 2).

The poster is bounded by the horizon, showing a vast expanse of space and conveying the profound artistic conception of «emptiness with substance». In the picture, a small figure appears on the horizon and becomes the visual focus, while the brand name subtly integrated into it effectively enhances the viewer's memory of the brand. The entire composition not only gives people a broad visual experience, but also stimulates the audience's infinite imagination, fully demonstrating the artistic charm of white space, highlighting the visual center, strengthening the theme design elements, and making the picture rich in layers and clear in theme [15].

Influence and Application of the Shape of Negative Space. In terms of using the shape of negative space to achieve design effects, the most common method is to use the positive – negative shape relationship of graphic elements, that is, the figure – ground relationship. This design method makes the negative space area a meaningful part of the design picture through visualization design. Japanese graphic designer Shigeo Fukuda is an outstanding representative of the negative space design method of figure – ground exchange. In the 1975 promotional poster he designed for Keio Department Store in Japan (for example, Fig. 3), the images of men's legs and women's legs are arranged alternately. These two groups of elements are each other's negative space and at the same time form independent graphics. This unique arrangement makes the picture full of strong design interest, greatly stimulates the audience's imagination, and fully reflects the successful



Fig. 2. Promotional Poster of Muji (by Kenya Hara)

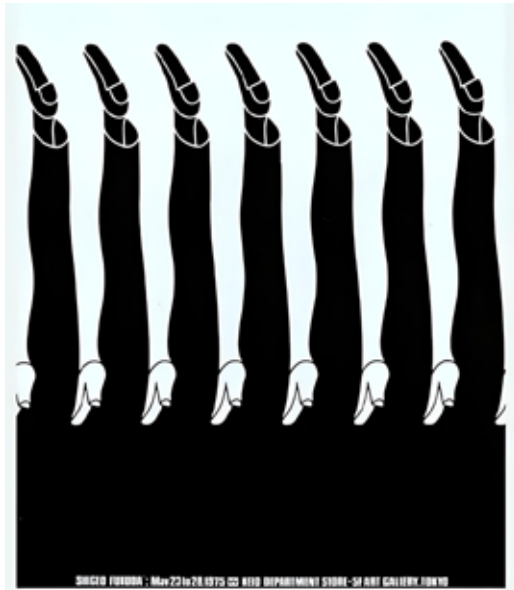


Fig. 3. Promotional Poster of Keio Department Store in Japan (by Shigeo Fukuda)

application of negative space as a graphic design means in poster design [13].

Influence and Application of the Color of Negative Space. When negative space is given color, it functions like a boundless graphic color block in the design. In poster design, the size of the area of negative space color and its reasonable configuration are of crucial importance. As the area of negative

space color changes, its light quantity and color quantity will also change accordingly, thus having different degrees of influence on the viewer’s visual perception and psychological feelings. For example, when a one – square – centimeter black appears in the visual range, it gives people a clear and clean visual effect; when facing a one – square – meter black, people often have a serious and oppressive psychological feeling; when surrounded by a one – hundred – square – meter black, it may trigger negative, gloomy and terrifying psychological reactions. Similarly, a one – square – centimeter pure red may make people feel bright and lovely, a one – square – meter pure red can make people feel excited and thrilled, while being surrounded by a one – hundred – square – meter pure red may cause the viewer to feel fatigue and unbearable irritability due to excessive stimulation (table 1). Therefore, in poster design, for some colors with strong contrast, when the area of negative space is small, the degree of stimulation is still within the range acceptable and appreciable by the viewer’s vision, and a good visual effect can be achieved. However, if the relationship between the area of negative space and color cannot be accurately grasped and exceeds the limit acceptable to the viewer’s vision, it will often cause the viewer’s aversion and resistance.

Table 1.

Key Features of Using Negative Space in Poster Design (Zhao A., 2025)

Color	Feeling	Area		
		One Square Centimeter	One Square Meter	One Hundred Square Meters
■ Red	Red	Bright and Lovely	Excited and Thrilled	Fatigue and Irritable
■ Black	Black	Clear and Clean	Serious Oppressive and	Negative, Gloomy and Terrifying

To sum up, negative space plays an important role that cannot be ignored in poster design. By reasonably using the elements such as the size, shape and color of negative space, the artistic appeal and information transmission effect of posters can be significantly improved, bringing unique and profound visual experiences and psychological feelings to the audience.

CONCLUSIONS

In the practice of poster design, the positive space occupied by the main design elements and the negative space are of equal importance. Negative space not only has important aesthetic value, but also has significant application advantages [9]. The visual functionality of negative space in poster design can be manipulated through alterations in its area, size, shape, and color, thereby enhancing both the functional utility and aesthetic appeal of the poster. Its own image can be shaped through ingenious design techniques. Negative space can enhance the layering of the layout, increase the spatial flexibility of the layout, create a comfortable reading atmosphere, and at the same time effectively enhance the visual impact of the poster, highlight the design subject, and improve the information transmission efficiency [18]. Therefore, when designing posters, designers should fully recognize the importance of negative space, deeply explore and rationally use the aesthetic characteristics, manifestation forms and application advantages of negative space, and create more attractive and appealing poster works. With the continuous development and innovation of the design field, the application prospects of negative space will become more and more broad. Designers need to continuously explore and experiment, organically combine negative space with other design elements, continuously expand design ideas, and create more colorful and creative poster design works to meet the increasingly diversified market demands and audience aesthetic expectations [17].

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АНОТАЦІЯ

Чжао Аксін, Безугла Р. Негативний простір у дизайні постерів: особливості застосування

Дослідження зосереджено на методах застосування негативного простору в дизайні плакатів та спрямоване на виявлення ключових принципів використання негативного простору для створення ілюзій, балансу та фокусу уваги, а також на розробленні рекомендацій для дизайнерів-практиків. У статті розкрито, як негативний простір впливає на психологічне сприйняття плакатів, сприяючи кращому запам'ятовуванню інформації та емоційному залученню аудиторії. Окрім того, здійснено порівняльний аналіз традиційного та сучасного дизайну плакатів із метою визначення еволюції застосування негативного простору в історичному та культурному аспектах.

Мета. Метою дослідження є комплексний аналіз особливостей застосування негативного простору в дизайні плакатів з акцентом на його роль у формуванні візуальної гармонії, посиленні повідомлення та адаптації до різних контекстів.

Методологія. Дослідження базується на комбінації теоретичних і емпіричних методів. Проведено аналіз наукової літератури, включаючи класичні праці

з графічного дизайну та сучасні джерела з візуальної комунікації. Застосовано якісні методи, такі як семіотичний аналіз, для розкриття символічного значення негативного простору, а також кількісні – статистичний аналіз даних про ефективність дизайну (читабельність, час фіксації погляду). Інструменти включали програмне забезпечення для візуального моделювання, таке як Adobe Illustrator, для створення експериментальних прототипів плакатів.

Результати. Дослідження виявило, що негативний простір у дизайні плакатів є не пасивним елементом, а активним інструментом для створення візуальних ілюзій, таких як формування прихованих форм чи акцентування ключових елементів. Зокрема, у маркетингових плакатах його застосування підвищує увагу, сприяючи кращому балансу між текстом і зображенням. У соціальній рекламі негативний простір посилює емоційний вплив, даючи змогу аудиторії «домалювати» повідомлення уявно. Виявлено чотири основні особливості: 1) мікрота макрорівні (малий простір між елементами vs. великий фон); 2) кольорові варіації (не лише білий, а й кольоровий негативний простір); 3) інтеграція з типографікою для покращення читабельності; 4) адаптація до цифрових форматів, де обмежений простір вимагає мінімалізму. Експерименти показали, що плакати з оптимальним негативним простором (30–50% площі) мають вищу ефективність порівняно з переповненими дизайнами. Розроблено практичні рекомендації, включаючи алгоритм балансування простору для початківців.

Наукова новизна. Новизна полягає у розробленні класифікації типів негативного простору спеціально для дизайну плакатів з урахуванням культурних особливостей (наприклад, інтеграція з орнаментами). Уперше запропоновано модель психологічного впливу негативного простору на основі гештальт-принципів, адаптовану до сучасних медіа. Дослідження розширює теоретичну базу, вводячи поняття «динамічного негативного простору» для інтерактивних плакатів, що не було достатньо висвітлено в попередніх роботах. Це сприяє розвитку графічного дизайну як наукової дисципліни в Україні та Китаї.

Практична значущість. Результати дослідження мають безпосереднє застосування у професійній діяльності графічних дизайнерів, даючи змогу оптимізувати процес створення плакатів для підвищення їх ефективності в реальних кампаніях. Використання негативного простору в дизайні плакату сприяє створенню більш привабливих матеріалів, що підвищують конверсію та залучення аудиторії. Практична значущість полягає у наданні інструментарію для підвищення конкурентоспроможності графічних дизайнерів на міжнародному ринку, де мінімалізм та ефективність є ключовими трендами.

Ключові слова: негативний простір, дизайн плаката, графічний дизайн, візуальна комунікація, білий простір, візуальна ієрархія, гештальт-принципи, мінімалізм у дизайні, емоційний вплив, читабельність, культурні аспекти, цифровий дизайн, семіотика плаката, баланс композиції, ілюзії у дизайні.

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