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VISUAL STRATEGIES OF THE SOCIAL POSTER IN UKRAINE

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Abstract. This article explores the visual strategies employed in Ukrainian social posters, with a focus on the use of metaphor and symbolism to convey socio-political messages. Through a detailed analysis, the study identifies three primary categories of metaphors: natural, social-domestic, and cultural-historical. The research methodology involves a visual content analysis of selected posters, examining how these metaphorical and symbolic elements function within the broader context of visual storytelling. The findings indicate that metaphor and symbolism are essential tools in the design of Ukrainian social posters, effectively enhancing the emotional and persuasive impact of the artwork. By integrating historical imagery and culturally significant symbols, the posters construct a shared cultural narrative that fosters unity and strengthens social identity, particularly in times of societal crisis. The study contributes to the understanding of metaphorical language in Ukrainian visual culture, providing insights into its role in shaping public perception and increasing message retention.

Key words: visual metaphor, symbolism, cultural narrative, social posters, national identity, emotional response, visual communication.

Introduction. The use of metaphors and symbolism in social posters has gained significant attention in contemporary research on visual communication and semiotics. The symbolic language of posters serves as a powerful tool to convey complex ideas, emotions, and cultural narratives in a simplified and impactful manner. In particular, the study of metaphor in posters highlights its importance in shaping public perception, influencing political and moral viewpoints, and reflecting historical and cultural contexts. Recent global literature has focused on the evolution of poster art, its role in social activism, and the interplay between traditional and modern visual forms. This article aims to explore the use of metaphor and symbolism in Ukrainian social posters, particularly in the context of socio-political changes and cultural identity formation. The objective of this study is to analyze the types of metaphors used, their impact on visual communication, and their significance in the context of modern Ukrainian society.

The research aims to address the following tasks:

To categorize the types of metaphors used in Ukrainian social posters.

To analyze the role of metaphor and symbolism in shaping the cultural narrative and social identity.

To evaluate the impact of these visual elements on public perception and emotional response.

Materials and Methods. The materials for this study include a collection of Ukrainian social posters created between 2014 and 2024, focusing on works that address key social issues such as domestic violence, environmental concerns, and the impact of the ongoing war. The research employs a semiotic analysis methodology, examining the visual language, metaphorical constructs, and symbolic imagery present in the posters. This approach allows for an in-depth interpretation of the cultural and socio-political messages embedded in the visual content. The well-established methods of visual analysis and semiotics are referenced according to standard academic guidelines.

The research methodology is based on a qualitative analysis of visual materials using semiotic and metaphor analysis frameworks. The study employs Peirce's model of signs and Barthes' theories

of semiotics to deconstruct the visual language of posters (Hatam, 2021). Additionally, the work incorporates a comparative analysis with existing international poster art studies to contextualize the Ukrainian examples. This methodology provides a comprehensive approach to understanding the cultural and symbolic significance of the visual elements used in social posters.

National and Historical Strategies (1990s–2000s). The history of the Ukrainian poster is closely tied to the development of Ukrainian visual art and graphic design as a whole. This relationship has been examined across different periods of Ukrainian art history, but its in-depth conceptualization occurred in the 20th century through a landmark national work, *The History of Ukrainian Art in 5 Volumes*, where the fifth volume covers 20th-century art (Skripnyk, 2006–2011). Within this framework, the poster emerged as a unique graphic art form, reflecting critical periods of Ukraine's cultural life: from active engagement in propaganda and agitation efforts to an expression of national identity in the 1990s when Ukraine achieved independence.

In the 1990s, the role of the poster transformed, taking on a new mission: it became a medium for expressing national consciousness and reflecting shifts in public sentiment. The poster's significance grew as it helped shape a distinct Ukrainian visual identity amid a period of national revival and the economic challenges of a transitional society. This era, marked by a search for self-awareness and a desire to establish Ukraine's cultural identity on the global stage, was characterized by both the preservation of national symbols and creative experimentation in styles and forms.

Despite these developments, the Ukrainian poster remained somewhat on the periphery of commercial graphic design, which evolved rapidly under the influences of globalization and technological progress. Scholar O. Khramova-Baranova (2014) noted that Ukrainian posters at this time displayed substantial stylistic diversity, reflecting both national and broader European trends. She identified several stages in the evolution of Ukrainian graphic design, each shaped by historical upheavals, such as wars, economic crises, and social transformations.

Within the context of national poster art, this period can also be viewed through the research of O. Lagutenko (2007; 2008), who highlighted that 20th-century Ukrainian poster art synthesized European and national stylistic features, maintaining a clear connection to sociopolitical events. During this time, the poster extended beyond purely graphic art to become an essential vehicle for visual and informational culture, embodying elements of Art Nouveau, modernism, and postmodernism.

Further contextualizing this evolution, O. Hladun's study (Hladun? 2018), *Ukrainian Poster: The Development Stages of Visual and Plastic Language*, analyzes how the visual and plastic language of Ukrainian posters evolved through these stages, shaped by social, economic, and technological factors. Hladun identifies key milestones in the development of the Ukrainian poster, emphasizing its role in reflecting national consciousness, adapting to global changes, and incorporating traditional symbols through contemporary design techniques.

Thus, the national and historical strategies that influenced the development of the Ukrainian poster in the 1990s and 2000s encapsulate a broad spectrum of themes related to social change, national identity, and adaptation to global challenges. These trends laid the groundwork for the continued evolution of the Ukrainian poster as a form that transcends graphic design, achieving a new level as a visual and informational phenomenon in the 21st century.

Critical Patriotism and Reflection During Wartime. Patriotism, as a unifying foundation for reviving the spiritual values of the Ukrainian people, reveals profound roots during this period of conflict. Through reflection, people gain a psychological and emotional understanding of the active patriotism that defines the Ukrainian people, particularly the youth, whose patriotism has evolved into a form of national-civic pride under martial law. This war, in essence, represents a battle for souls, with spirituality serving as a reminder of our sensitivity to others' pain, loss, and death, and our moral superiority over the aggressor.

The critical importance of reflection is essential in understanding Ukrainian patriotism during war. This reflection involves examining both personal and societal experiences, deepening a sense of belonging and ownership of one's country. Researcher O. Luchaninova (2023) asserts that during the war, Ukrainians have developed a strong internal resolve, learning to navigate challenging circumstances, assess risks, and take full responsibility. Thousands of young people, including students, have learned to independently choose their paths, recognizing their talents and potentials to acquire necessary skills and assume roles suited to their abilities.

Linguist K. Blyzniuk (2019), exploring the semantic field of «patriotism», describes it as encompassing love, devotion, respect, passion, elevation, courage, and the desire to help. Volunteering, as a collective action, has emerged as a vital expression of this desire to assist those suffering or fighting in the war. Patriotism is embodied in symbols of national pride and resistance, like the embroidered shirt, which serves as a means of self-expression and a symbol of defiance. This symbolism extends to murals, which reflect the nation's resilience and solidarity in the face of adversity.

Across the globe, murals dedicated to Ukraine's fight for freedom remind the world that Ukraine is fighting for universal human values. Murals feature powerful images: a dove symbolizing peace in Germany, a child covering toys with a blue-and-yellow flag in the Czech Republic, an eye witnessing explosions in Kyiv in the UK, a woman adorned in blue and yellow in Poland, and a girl in France representing the human toll of war. In Bakhmut, once home to the mural «Community of Happy People», buildings with symbolic murals have collapsed, yet new murals continue to appear. These murals visually express the world's reflection on Ukrainian courage and tragedy, standing as symbols of global support.

Language too has become a significant factor in patriotism. Since the start of the war, the use of Ukrainian has surged, becoming a defining aspect of identity and unity. Countries that preserve and promote their native languages have established numerous language institutions (Japan, for instance, has nearly a hundred), while Ukraine has only one. Language is crucial as it shapes public and political discourse and reflects societal values.

Patriotism reflects social actions driven by individual motivations and psychological responses to national challenges. Spencer (2009) emphasizes that patriotism holds a central place in self-concept, involving value orientations that encourage responsible behavior for the good of the country. According to O. Luchaninova (2023), the spiritual development of students during wartime naturally occurs through helpful actions, community involvement, and a growing sense of national solidarity.

This ongoing war acts as a catalyst, amplifying patriotism across all levels of Ukrainian society. Abramchuk (2008) argues that patriotism adapts to social and historical contexts, taking on specific national significance and forms. During wartime, patriotism becomes a moral bond, a sense of duty and sacrifice in defense of one's land and people, manifesting as both a moral principle and a political force. The war has shown that Ukrainians place the values of homeland, family, and freedom above even their own lives, demonstrating a deeply engaged patriotism.

This transformative patriotism has been visually captured in posters by artists like Nikita Shilimov, who states that his art exposes the realities of «Russian world» propaganda and dismantles the romanticism associated with it. D. Dzyuba created his first war-inspired poster on a napkin just three days after February 24, 2022, while M. Palenko acknowledges that his artistic work has taken on additional meaning and responsibility. A. Yaloza's posters «shout about death, pain, love, and courage», reflecting both personal and national resilience. In the curated project War-Time Posters, artists from Ukraine and abroad – including N. Lobach, A. Sai, Z. Horobyev, M. Shilimov, and others – contribute artwork that channels their experiences into collective expressions of national unity.

The Ukrainian people's patriotism, driven by reflection on their personal and collective war-time experiences, has matured into an unwavering resolve to defend their nation. This reflection has allowed Ukrainians to express their patriotism not only as a feeling but as actions, as a highest form of

value. Young generations of Ukrainians, raised in independent Ukraine, are now fulfilling the national idea – embodying shared values of freedom, justice, and solidarity. Patriotism unites people on the front lines, in communities, and in the hearts of compatriots, solidifying a nation’s resolve and an indomitable will to preserve the homeland.

As war continues to reshape Ukrainian society, the phenomenon of Ukrainian patriotism will be explored in dissertations and preserved in history through the legacy of passionate defenders, artists, and volunteers whose actions reflect a profound love for Ukraine. This is not merely a wartime spirit; it’s a permanent shift towards a cohesive society ready to uphold the values of justice, freedom, and cultural pride.

Global Responsibility and Solidarity (from 2022). The theme of global responsibility and solidarity has become central in Ukrainian social posters since the onset of Russia’s full-scale invasion in 2022. As highlighted by Ukrainian scholars, such as H. Myskiv and I. Pasinovych, the war has severely hindered sustainable development efforts in Ukraine and has posed significant threats to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) worldwide. The destructive impact extends beyond Ukraine, affecting other regions, with poorer countries expected to bear the heaviest burden. Sustainable development, they emphasize, is inseparably linked with social responsibility, which is essential for resilience.

Since the invasion, international governments, corporations, and individuals have demonstrated social responsibility by supporting Ukraine through various means. Their actions rest on core principles: value-driven orientation, solidarity, empathy, voluntary financial sacrifices, and unconditional support. This groundswell of international solidarity underscores that sustainable development cannot be achieved without the active participation of global businesses. Global companies increasingly contribute to social and environmental initiatives, and during the war, many of these corporations have supported Ukrainians affected by Russian aggression through humanitarian and financial aid. Ukrainian businesses, too, have engaged in initiatives to support the Ukrainian Armed Forces, displaced persons, and war victims, demonstrating a high level of social responsibility. For businesses operating in post-war Ukraine, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives will provide a wide scope for alleviating local issues caused by the war. Analyzing non-financial corporate reports reveals that Ukrainian companies are aligning their CSR activities with specific SDGs, benefiting both communities and enhancing their reputations.

In an insightful discussion hosted by the Center for Contemporary Culture in Dnipro, T. Zlobina, editor-in-chief of «Gender in Detail» and PhD in Philosophy, spoke about the complexities of decolonial solidarity and the challenges Western perspectives face in fully understanding the Ukrainian context. She argued that solidarity, especially in times of war, demands a break from habitual views and requires deep empathy. Drawing from the October 2022 online discussion «In Search of Alliances: Solidarity and Cooperation During Wartime», Zlobina noted the difficulty Western countries, particularly in peaceful European societies, have in recognizing Ukraine’s colonial history with Russia. The notion of decolonial solidarity asks allies to rethink abstract pacifism and calls for sustained, specific support for Ukrainian sovereignty.

The concept of solidarity, especially within the framework of decolonization, highlights that Ukrainian experiences are often obscured by global narratives dominated by Eurocentric and Russian perspectives. Ukrainians are increasingly calling for a restructuring of international alliances and institutions to better reflect the realities of the 21st century. According to Zlobina, in this interconnected world, crises, whether caused by war, climate change, or migration, inevitably affect all nations. Therefore, global citizens must prioritize collaborative approaches that align with modern challenges, replacing outdated frameworks from the 20th century.

A narrative commonly voiced in Western pacifist circles – «the main thing is for the war to end» – fails to resonate with Ukrainians who see victory and the end of aggression as essential for true peace.

This notion, according to Zlobina, stems from a lack of understanding about the depth of Ukraine's struggle against Russian imperialism. Abstract calls for peace without justice overlook the reality that an unresolved conflict would perpetuate occupation, terror, and further military build-up by Russia. For Ukrainians, true peace only comes through victory over aggression, as war is resolved not by simple cessation but by the triumph of values and justice. We further elaborate that solidarity in a conflict requires informed support, challenging Eurocentric assumptions about Russian culture and imperial history. Western countries' longstanding admiration for Russian literature, such as Tchaikovsky, often overshadows the violent colonial history of the Russian Empire. Breaking away from these perceptions demands a willingness to learn about the marginalized narratives of Ukrainian history and to re-evaluate the role of Russian cultural icons in global consciousness.

Western societies are now realizing the precariousness of relying on Russian resources, exemplified by Germany's post-2014 dependency on Russian gas. This dependence reveals a significant gap between perceived security and the harsh reality of geopolitical entanglements. For Ukrainians, the expectation of solidarity means a call for international communities to actively engage, resist complacency, and pursue an understanding that goes beyond superficial peace. Ukrainian social posters and global solidarity campaigns demonstrate a commitment to a more profound form of support, transcending political and cultural divides. This solidarity is not simply a response to Ukraine's needs but a shared effort to build a more resilient, just world for the future.

Key visual strategies in Ukrainian social posters.

1. *Symbolism and color palette.* One of the distinguishing features of Ukrainian social posters is the strategic use of symbolism through color, reflecting both cultural and national identity. The color palette often serves as a visual metaphor, conveying specific meanings tied to historical events, social movements, and national sentiments.

The blue and yellow colors, directly associated with the Ukrainian flag, are frequently used to evoke patriotic feelings. Blue represents the expansive sky and the spirit of freedom, while yellow symbolizes the wheat fields, indicative of Ukraine's agricultural richness. Posters from the series «Ukraine is Europe» effectively use this combination to communicate aspirations of integration with European values and solidarity with the global democratic community.

Red and black color schemes are emblematic of resistance and struggle, particularly in the context of Ukraine's fight for independence. In the poster «Red is Blood, Black is Earth» (2014), red symbolizes the blood of those who sacrificed their lives during the Revolution of Dignity, while black represents the fertile but contested land of Ukraine. This powerful imagery evokes the deep historical and emotional layers of the national struggle for sovereignty.

The use of green, blue, and earthy tones in posters highlights themes of environmental conservation. Green is synonymous with nature, growth, and hope, while blue often represents water, essential for life. In the poster «Clean Rivers, Green Ukraine», the harmonious blend of these colors emphasizes the urgency of protecting the environment, appealing to viewers' sense of responsibility towards future generations. The deliberate use of color in Ukrainian social posters enhances their communicative power, allowing designers to embed layers of meaning that resonate with the audience on both conscious and subconscious levels.

2. *Integration of folk and cultural motifs.* Ukrainian social posters are notable for their incorporation of folk elements, blending traditional cultural symbols with contemporary design to create a unique visual identity that is both modern and deeply rooted in history. Traditional Ukrainian embroidery (vyshyvanka) patterns are frequently used to symbolize cultural heritage and identity. In the poster «Ukraine is Us», the silhouette of a person is decorated with intricate embroidery, highlighting the continuity of folk traditions and their importance in defining national identity. This visual approach creates a bridge between the past and present, reinforcing the message of cultural unity.

The viburnum berry (kalyna), a popular motif in Ukrainian folklore, is often depicted as a symbol of vitality, resilience, and rebirth. In the environmental-themed poster “Save the Viburnum – Save Ukraine”, the imagery of the berry is combined with a message of ecological preservation, drawing a parallel between the survival of this native plant and the wellbeing of the nation.

The trident (Tryzub), as Ukraine's national emblem, symbolizes statehood and national sovereignty. It appears in many posters as a unifying symbol, often depicted alongside soldiers or integrated into scenes of national resistance. For example, in the poster «The People and the Army Are One», the trident is stylized as part of a soldier's silhouette, symbolizing the inseparable bond between the Ukrainian people and their armed forces. By weaving cultural motifs into the design, these posters not only convey a sense of tradition and national pride but also strengthen the emotional connection with the viewers.

3. *Minimalism and conciseness.* Contemporary Ukrainian social posters often embrace minimalism, focusing on simplicity and clarity to amplify the impact of their message. This visual approach helps to emphasize the main idea, making the posters easily understandable and memorable.

The trend towards minimalism involves reducing unnecessary elements, relying instead on key visual symbols that convey the core message. In the poster «Stay Human» by N. Titov, a simple depiction of a hand holding a heart effectively symbolizes the call for empathy and humanity during times of conflict. The straightforward composition allows the viewer to immediately grasp the emotional message without distraction.

Posters addressing environmental issues often use minimalist imagery to communicate the message effectively. The poster «Breathe», designed for an environmental campaign, features a silhouette of a tree shaped like human lungs. This clever visual metaphor underscores the essential role of nature in human survival, conveying a powerful message with minimal visual elements.

The use of minimalism enhances the emotional resonance of the poster, making it easier for the viewer to connect with the message. By focusing on a single, strong visual element, designers create a sense of urgency and intimacy, facilitating quick recognition and response from the audience. Minimalist design in Ukrainian social posters is not merely an aesthetic choice but a strategic one, aimed at maximizing communicative efficiency and emotional engagement.

Graphic collage and typography. The use of graphic collage and dynamic typography in Ukrainian social posters adds depth and complexity, reflecting the multifaceted nature of social issues. These techniques enable designers to create rich, layered visuals that offer multiple interpretations.

Collage is used to combine different visual elements, creating a narrative that reflects the complexity of the issue at hand. In the poster “No to Domestic Violence”, a photomontage of a face with a bruise is overlaid with torn legal documents, symbolizing the breakdown of family trust and the legal struggle for justice. This multi-layered composition captures the emotional and social implications of domestic violence, engaging the viewer on both an intellectual and emotional level.

Typography in Ukrainian social posters often serves a dual role: providing information and conveying emotion. The poster “Together We Are Strong” features bold, oversized text that dominates the visual field, emphasizing the collective power and unity of the people. The use of dynamic, contrasting fonts creates a sense of urgency, compelling the viewer to take action or reflect on the message.

In the digital realm, kinetic typography is becoming a popular choice for enhancing viewer engagement. Animated text effects are used to highlight key words or phrases, making the message more memorable. For instance, in a digital poster campaign for mental health awareness, the words “You Are Not Alone” slowly appear and then fade, visually mimicking the process of reaching out and finding support.

By integrating collage techniques and innovative typography, Ukrainian social posters effectively capture the viewer's attention and convey complex social messages with clarity and emotional depth. These strategies demonstrate the versatility and creativity of Ukrainian social poster design. Through

the use of symbolism, cultural motifs, minimalist design, and advanced graphic techniques, these posters succeed in delivering impactful messages that resonate with diverse audiences, making them a powerful tool for social advocacy and cultural expression.

The impact of color on poster perception. Colors are a powerful communication tool as they evoke different emotional reactions and influence the viewer's behavior. An analysis of social and advertising posters shows that each color serves a specific function. For instance, red in the «Say NO to Violence!» poster triggers alertness and draws attention to the issue of domestic abuse. Yellow in the «Choose a Clean Future» poster is associated with sunshine and optimism, highlighting the hope for a better environmental future. Meanwhile, blue in the «Peace on Earth» poster creates a sense of calm and stability, reinforcing the message of peace.

Composition Principles and Poster Structure. Ukrainian artists working on social posters actively employ various compositional laws and principles to create cohesive and balanced visual images. For example, in the poster «Don't Stay Silent!», the principle of contrast highlights an image of a sealed mouth with a ribbon labeled "STOP," emphasizing the need to speak out against violence. In the poster «Children Are Our Future», the principle of scale is used, with a large image of a child drawing attention and stressing the importance of protecting children during wartime. The principle of functionality is well-exemplified in the «Get Vaccinated – Protect Others» poster, where every element of the composition works to convey the message about the importance of vaccination.

The integration of modern and digital techniques. Modern Ukrainian social posters have embraced digital design techniques, allowing for greater creativity and innovation in visual storytelling. The use of digital collage, motion graphics, and augmented reality (AR) elements has become more prevalent, especially in online campaigns where engagement is key. The poster «See the Truth», for instance, uses a digital collage that merges photographic elements with illustrated overlays, creating a layered narrative about media misinformation. In another example, the AR-enabled poster «Rebuild Ukraine» allows viewers to scan the poster with their smartphones to see a 3D animation of a city being rebuilt, providing an interactive and immersive experience that deepens the viewer's connection to the message.

The use of motion graphics in digital posters has also become a powerful tool for capturing attention, especially on social media platforms. Short animations, such as those used in the «Act Now for Climate» campaign, combine kinetic typography with moving illustrations, creating a dynamic and engaging visual experience that is more likely to be shared and spread virally. This integration of traditional design principles with cutting-edge digital techniques reflects the evolving nature of Ukrainian social posters as they adapt to new media and changing audience behaviors.

Through these innovations, Ukrainian social posters continue to be a vital and evolving form of visual communication, effectively addressing critical social issues while resonating with audiences both locally and globally. Thus, contemporary Ukrainian social posters represent a multi-layered cultural phenomenon that combines traditional and innovative approaches, integrating national motifs, symbolism, minimalism, and collage techniques to create powerful visual messages that resonate with modern audiences.

Discussion. The analysis reveals several key findings regarding the use of metaphor and symbolism in Ukrainian social posters. Natural metaphors, such as anthropomorphism and zoomorphism, are frequently employed to depict human emotions and societal issues. Cultural-historical metaphors draw upon significant national symbols and historical imagery, reinforcing a sense of cultural identity and unity. Social-domestic metaphors highlight everyday life and resonate deeply with the target audience, making the message more relatable and effective. These findings align with the broader trend observed in international poster art, where metaphor and symbolism play crucial roles in visual storytelling and audience engagement. The study contributes new insights into the understanding of

metaphorical language in Ukrainian visual culture and offers potential applications for enhancing the effectiveness of social and political messaging through poster design.

Conclusions. The analysis identified three main categories of metaphors used in Ukrainian social posters: natural (including anthropomorphism and zoomorphism), social-domestic, and cultural-historical. These metaphor types effectively convey complex ideas and enhance the visual impact of the posters.

The study demonstrates that metaphor and symbolism play a significant role in shaping the cultural narrative and reinforcing social identity in Ukrainian poster art. The use of historical imagery and national symbols helps to construct a shared cultural context, fostering a sense of unity and collective memory.

The metaphorical and symbolic elements of Ukrainian social posters have a strong influence on public perception, evoking emotional responses and increasing message retention. By leveraging visual metaphors, designers can communicate socio-political issues more effectively, making the posters a powerful tool for social influence and cultural expression.

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