

Investigation of Form and Content in Designing Covers of Specialized Psychology Books Published in Iran from 2008 to 2018

Abstract

The present article statistically investigates and analyzes the form and content of the cover of specialized psychology books published in Iran from 2008 to 2018. For this, this study provides a detailed investigation of five sample covers from each year in terms of styles, form, etc. Although the statistics obtained can be evaluated from a sociological and economic point of view, this article, considering the scope of the definition, also gives tables and statistical charts and provides the results from a visual perspective. The results reveal that titles of most of the books are written horizontally on the upper-half left side of the cover using common computer fonts. Designers have mainly focused on the legibility of the book when providing titles for the books. Almost in all cases, the names of the work's author and the translator are written in very smaller fonts under the title. However, if the author of the work is a renowned one, its name is written in larger fonts above the title. The main image inserted on the cover (including the design or photo) is, in most cases, located in the center of the cover so that it would appeal to the user at the first encounter. In popular books, light, warm, diverse and pure colors tend to be used, while colors used in specialized books tend to be dark, cold, and mixed. In books with education, family, and youth subjects, photography techniques with human subjects and colors of green and blue spectrums have been significantly used, conceptually conforming with the subjects. In books with subjects of stress and anxiety, red and black colors of oblique combination tend to be greatly used.

Keywords: *Specialized Psychology Books, Cover Design Form, Cover Design Content*

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Introduction

As a visual medium more widely circulated than graphic media, cover design has been produced as an applied-artistic work available to users. In this connection, psychology books have their covers distinguished from other books due to their special users, either educated or those who suffer from psychological problems. The cover design indicates the genre, theme, and group of users of the book. The elements forming the book cover include the name, title, sub-title, and over-title (description about the subject matter or name of the book) of the book, images and possible elements selected by the designer, along with colors, names of the author, and translator, name of the publisher(s) and several publications. Even though the book cover is made of different parts including the front cover, book block, back cover, etc. it generally includes a generality that should be taken into account by the designer. The front cover is more important than the other parts. It is the first part of the book the user encounters (Manavi Rad, 2017:76). The book cover must present a symbolic reflection of the concepts and matters discussed inside the book. The cover design is, in fact, a representation of the book's content (Afshar-Mohajer, 2010:161). As a result, the designer should work to create better communication with the situation of the society and peoples' sentiments which depends on his/her experience and familiarity with the popular culture (Momayyez, 2001:12). The designer is tasked with best representing the content of the book by establishing a great book cover (Aghdashlou,

2013, 25), thus, characterizing the book concepts and subject matters in a symbolic manner (Afshar-Mohajer, 2008:43). A medium like a book cover can form the visual taste, habits, and aesthetic and visual criteria (Manavi Rad, 2017:25). Failure to determine the cultural level and perceptual abilities of the users is one of the challenges that is plaguing our modern graphics; as a consequence, many of the works fail to establish an intended communication with the user (Mesghali, 2011:36).

A designer makes all his/her best to turn a book into what appears to be beyond the limits and scope of a book and make it a consumer good that is not only provided in bookstores but is also supplied in the supermarkets and large chain stores on the shelves so that they compete with daily consumer items (Sayyah, 2016:34). What is today provided as a book cover under the general category of graphic art refers to a kind of art whose fundamentals should be sought at the beginning of the modern publication of the book, and a new vision of cover design as a factor to demonstrate the book content and communication with the user. In the past centuries, Iranians were not used to relating book covers with the specific subject matter of the books which made the designs different from others. This style, however, continued for over a thousand years (Aghdashlou, 2014:35).

In 1941, the cover design appeared in Iran in its current sense, which was followed by the publication of books and journals. From 1941 to 1953, journals of Payam-e-Novin, Sokhan, Mardom, and several other journals paid special attention to

cover designs. The rise of book cover design at that time was mainly indebted to Mohammad Bahrami who, according to Morteza Momayyez, can be considered the founder of modern cover design in Iran (Haghighi, 2005:20).

Lavasani (2016) reviewed the cover designs of post-revolution fiction stories and pointed out the significance of the fiction in recent decades. In his visual investigations of these book covers, he has noted that cover designs have transformed from illustrative forms into photography. He also found that single-color printing had prevailed and that the use of free handwriting was being widely used as time passed. In his study, Zargardzadeh (2016) tended to analyze the negative setting in cover designs of fictional stories. To him, a negative setting contributes to creating a relationship between the writing and the image, and cohesion by combining and dividing setting aesthetics, which would finally better convey the book content.

In his thesis, entitled "Review of Visual Structure and Elements of the Covers of Fiction Books of the Holy Defense", Hamzeh Mostafavi (2015) uses a qualitative method and adopts a semiotic approach to select the samples via convenience method. He found that designers have provided a definite and realistic impression of the book texts, and thus, avoiding users' imagination. On the other hand, the works, for him, have indicated values and goals that justify the greater use of the conceptual manner. Mahmoudian (2008) considers illustratively technical differences between children and adults and explains their capacities to introduce and state the subject matters as related to the book cover designs. To him, the presence of an image along the text can greatly contribute to the reader to better perceive the content. This study mostly focused on the technique administered on the book cover.

Akbari Tabar (2012) also investigated an appealing cover design from the user's perspective and examined the cover design process in other countries in comparison to Iran. He used an online survey to encourage different groups to take part in the survey. The findings suggested that the cover design process of each book was different from the other and required investment, energy, and special attention. Some factors were seen to be effective in cover designs that may have been different from other factors affecting the cover design of the other.

Manavi Rad (2012) also investigated the book cover design and emphasized Faris novels, suggesting that prior to the 1990s, the use of illustration technique was common and the more we approached the 2000s, the use of photos became widely used due to the advancements of the printing industry. In his thesis, entitled "Investigation of Typography on Cover Designs of Social-Literary Themes in Iran in the Last Three Decades", Saki (2012) concluded that the use of calligraphy and visual and formative elements of Iranian scripts, as

compared to official fonts, were the most significant factors behind the creation of those works.

Mirshafiei (2013) comparatively investigated the images on the covers and inside the books of the Islamic era, finding that the more subtle and applicable techniques could be seen in making covers in the Timurid dynasty. However, the techniques more widely used for mass production were enjoying a greater speed of administration and date back to the Safavid era. Nourian (2014) also addressed book cover designs of adolescents aged 10-15 years in France over the past two decades. In his dissertation, Koochi (2017) visually explored the illustrated covers investigation and analyzes the covers qualified for the competition "50 Books: 50 Covers", concluding that the administrated technique on the covers had changed under the influence of advanced printing devices, while illustrated samples had dropped. In "Investigation of Cover Designs of Scientific and Educational Books from a Semiotic Perspective", Mansouri, (2016) has analyzed and interpreted the cover designs of scientific and educational books using semiotics, seeking to discover the relationship between the signs and the entire work.

In her thesis, entitled "Review of the Semantic Relationship between Cover Design and Book Content", Gelareh Tavassoli (2011) analyzes the cover designs of dramatic literature books from a semiotics angle and reveals the relations between the signs and the illustrative system administered on those covers. Rastegard Zare' (2016) investigates in his thesis the relationship between music and cover design of audio children's songs of the 2000s and the 2010s in Iran, concluding that not only an appropriate relationship could be found between the music content and the cover design of the album, but also this area had received less attention in graphics, resulting in low-quality children book cover designs.

Kazemi (2011) investigates in his thesis the cover design of storybooks using two types of photo expression and illustration in the 70s and the 80s. Shafiei (2012) also examines the semantic relationship between the music book cover and its content. Ghadaksaz Khosrow-Shahi (2017) investigate the visual elements of the cover designs of youth novels in the past two decades in Iran. Soltani-Azar (2015) also examined the graphical structure of the cover designs of Holy Defense novels published by Source-ye-Mehr from the 80s to the 2000s.

One of the most important tools to promote culture in modern societies is to promote the culture of book reading. In recent years, reading psychology books and purchasing these books with different subjects of success, self-help, characters, etc. had accounted for a large part of sales of the bookstores. Since cover designs have an impressive effect on attracting users and raising the visual taste of society, it is imperative to focus on cover designs and the relationship between the cover design and content and the subject of psychology books.

Consistent with the research done in this regard, no coherent study has ever examined the visual and statistical components of cover designs of psychology books as well as the relationship between their form and content. Thus, the significance of designing psychology books from a user-appeal point of view, and also the absence of an appropriate authority to monitor the cover designs have necessitated the conduct of this research. In sum, the present study deals with the form and content in designing cover designs of specialized psychology books released in Iran from 2008 to 2018.

Method

This study has an applied and developmental goal. The selected samples are based on various classifications (e.g., year of publication, design technique, design style, etc.), and the research method combines both quantitative and qualitative methods with data analysis being descriptive-analytical.

The target population is all the covers of psychology books published from 2008 to 2018. Since it was impossible to access all the book covers stated, the maximal sampling method was performed by accessing covers of psychology books from multiple sources, including libraries of Teran, Hakim Sabzevari, and Neishabouri Universities, National Iranian library, Navi Library of Sabzevar and Imam Reza Library of Sabzevar, as well as bookstores of the Tehran's Enghelab Street as the center for the sale of books in Iran. Also, Tehran Bagh Ketab and various Internet publication sites were used. These centers represented the whole statistical population of the study. It is noteworthy that the criterion to determine psychology books is the claim made by the publishers on the ID section of the books. The overall number of the samples amounted to 3045 book covers, classified by photographing, observation and note-taking.

In order to analyze the samples, it is imperative to classify the samples from different angles. This study classifies the samples by the year of publication (2008-2018), design styles (realist, abstract, typographical, traditionalist, and fantasy styles), design technique (photography with human subject, photography with non-human subject, illustration), and by popular and specialized books and by the relationship between form and content. It is noteworthy that the criterion of sample classification in the prevailing style is the visual style. For this, two or several styles may have been used in designing a cover; thus, the researcher has considered the prevailing visual style. Data gathered were given in bar charts using Excel.

Findings

Images of 3045 covers of books published from 2008 to 2018 are investigated as statistical samples. The samples were gathered from various sources of libraries, bookstores, and Specialized Psychology Internet Websites which included different subjects of family psychology, educational psychology, psychology of children and adolescents, psychology of labor and success, psychoanalysis and psychiatry, clinical psychology, scientific books, and academic psychologies journals. Data gathered were classified for accurate evaluation in several respects. This classification included the year of publication, visual style (realist, modern, typographical, fantasy and traditionalist), distinguished by specialized and popular books, and by form and content relation.

Of the total books of psychology under study (from 2008 to 2018), realist, abstract, modern, typographical, fantasy and traditionalist cover designs accounted for 37.3%, 21.6%, 19.5%, 14.7%, 5% and 1.8%, respectively. A lower percentage of fantasy and traditionalist styles and a higher percentage of realist styles represented a natural trend considering the content of psychology books with a scientific approach. A summary of the results is given in Table 1 which provides the percentage of using each visual style

Table 1: Total number of book covers studied by the year of publication and visual style

Year Style	Realist	Modern	Typographical	Abstract	Fantasy	Traditionalist	Total
2008	105	45	27	58	22	3	260
2009	95	39	27	33	13	4	211
2010	114	31	33	57	7	4	246
2011	91	30	20	73	12	7	233
2012	49	30	19	38	3	5	144
2013	119	45	51	45	16	2	278
2014	85	63	31	51	13	7	250
2015	94	57	35	61	11	5	263
2016	126	76	60	75	13	6	356
2017	146	106	61	95	23	9	440
2018	112	71	84	73	20	4	364
Total	1136	593	448	659	153	56	3045
%	37.3	19.5	14.7	21.6	5.0	1.8	100.0

Chart 1 gives the number of books gathered by each year and the visual style. Approximately, the ratio of a tendency to design styles in all the years is close to

the percentages of the total number. Moreover, the number of covers of the books gathered each year involves an acceptable value for statistical analysis.

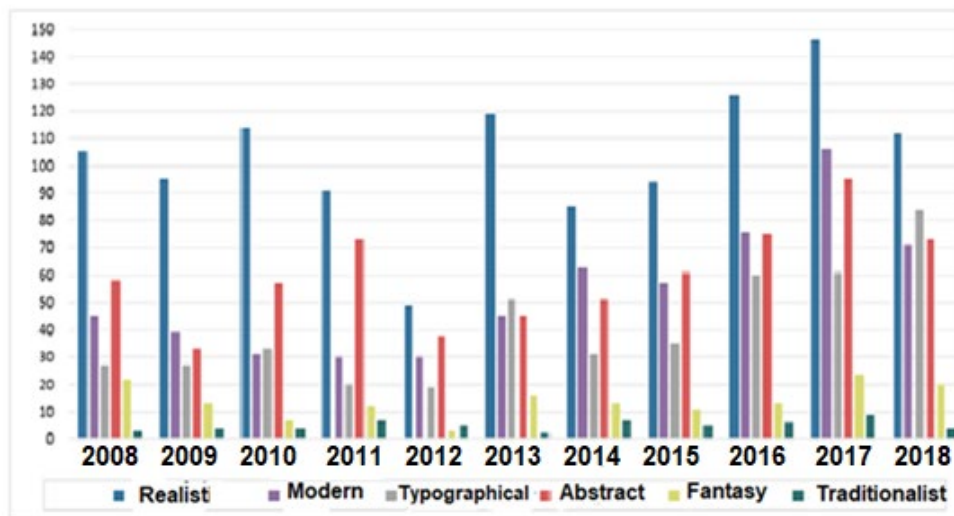


Chart 1: Number of book covers designed by the visual style

Book cover designs were examined and classified in terms of techniques used in each style (excluding fantasy and traditionalist styles which, according to

the low number of book covers designed with those styles, could not be examined). Detailed results of this are given in Table 2, and relevant charts (3-3) and (3-6) along with explanations are also provided.

Table 2: Cover of the books examined by visual styles and design techniques

Year Style	Technique	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total		%
Typographical	Typographic letters	24	22	30	15	15	37	28	28	49	51	76	375	448	83.7%
	Calligraphic	1	4	1	2	2	4	1	2	0	3	3	23		5.1%
	Handwritten	1	0	1	2	1	4	1	3	4	5	2	24		5.4%
	Innovative	1	1	1	1	1	6	1	2	7	2	3	26		5.8%
Realist	Photography with human subject	58	56	53	58	28	82	48	47	57	76	35	598	1136	52.6%
	Photography with non-human subject	34	32	45	26	20	26	33	37	61	58	61	433		38.15
	Illustration and painting	13	7	16	7	1	11	4	10	8	12	16	105		9.2%
Abstract	Geometric and broken lines	14	7	7	10	3	6	10	7	15	14	10	103	659	15.6%
	Non-geometric	24	16	26	47	24	23	23	40	40	62	43	368		55.8%
	Semi-abstract	20	10	24	16	11	16	18	14	20	19	20	188		28.5%
Modern	Photography and mixing photos	21	22	20	15	16	20	32	36	31	31	30	274	593	46.2%
	Illustration and painting	24	17	11	15	24	25	31	21	45	75	41	319		53.8%

The present article has used the relationship between form and content to classify the gathered samples into two relevant (cover design matches with the book subject) and irrelevant (cover design does not match with the book subjects) groups. It is noteworthy that this classification is performed disregarding the content and administration quality of the design and the criterion of classification is

simply based on the relationship between the design on the cover with the subject of the book. In total, 74% of the designed covers fell under the relevant category, while 26% were under the irrelevant category. In the six styles discussed, the highest relationship between the designed covers and the subject was found in fantasy and modern styles with 94.1% and 88.2%, respectively (Table 3).

Table 3: Number and percentage of the book covers examined in terms of relevancy and irrelevancy of the cover design with the book content

Style \ Number	Realist	Modern	Typographical	Abstract	Fantasy	Traditionalist	Total
Total number	1136	593	448	659	153	56	3045
Relevant cases	832	523	223	509	144	21	2252
Irrelevant cases	304	70	225	150	9	35	793
Relevant percentages	73.2%	88.2%	49.8%	77.2%	94.1%	37.5%	74.00%
Irrelevant percentages	26.8%	11.8%	50.2%	22.8%	5.9%	62.5%	26.00%

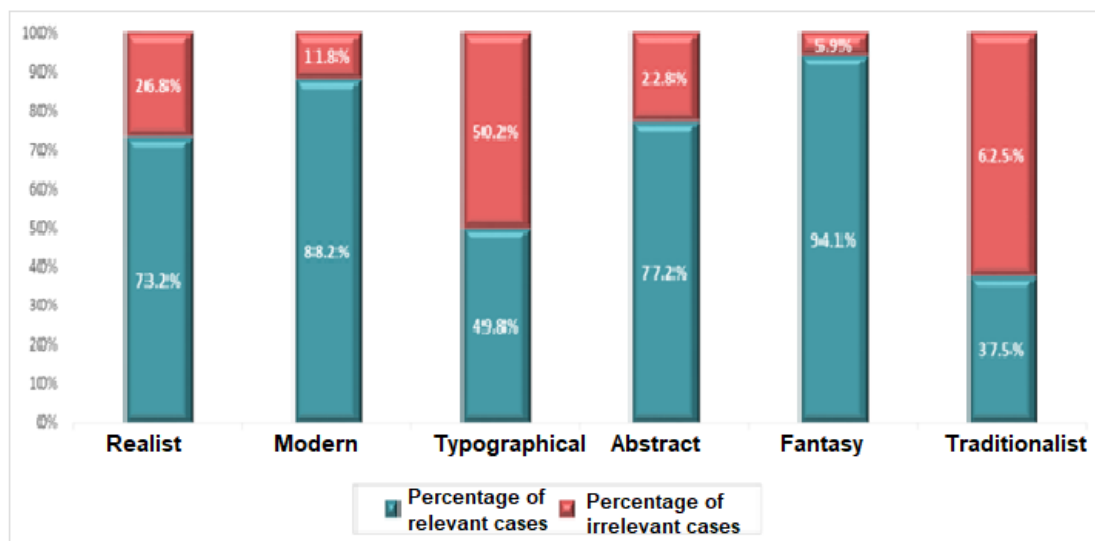


Chart 2: Percentage of relevancy and irrelevancy of book covers with the content by visual styles

Out of 3045 books selected, 762 covers pertained to specialized psychology books, including academic books, reference books, and those related to psychology principles and basics. In this part, cover design by realist, abstract, modern, typographical, fantasy and traditionalist styles were 34.2%, 31.1%,

24.2%, 7.9%, 0.8%, and 1.7%, respectively. Results about the number and percentage of a tendency to each visual style and the statistical distribution by each year of publication are given in Table 4 and Chart 3.

Table 4: Number of specialized book covers examined by each year and visual style

Style \ Year	Realist	Modern	Typographical	Abstract	Fantasy	Traditionalist	Sum of each year
2008	20	16	5	33	1	1	76
2009	12	8	2	6	0	0	28
2010	15	12	6	13	0	2	48
2011	17	10	3	22	0	0	52
2012	14	14	5	10	0	1	44
2013	31	6	2	13	0	0	52
2014	20	23	2	16	0	1	62
2015	34	22	7	31	2	3	99
2016	34	33	10	43	0	2	122
2017	60	45	12	50	2	4	173
2018	38	20	14	31	2	1	106
Total	295	209	68	268	7	15	862
Percentage	34.2%	24.2%	7.9%	31.1%	0.8%	1.7%	100.0%

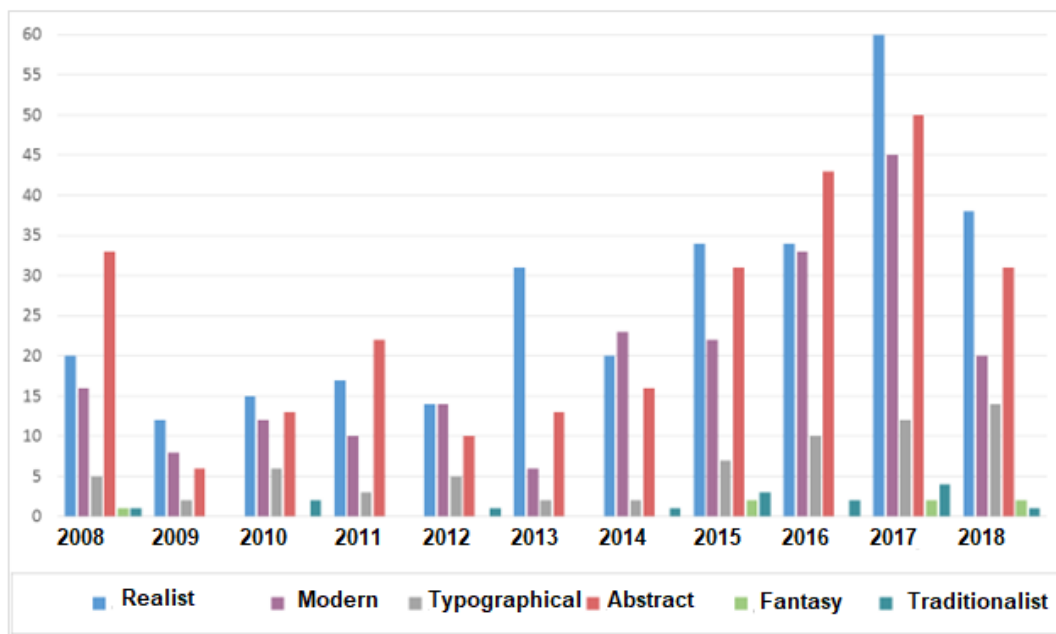


Chart 3: Number of specialized book covers designed with each style in different years

Examining the relationship between form and content of specialized psychology books

Considering the relationship between form and content of specialized psychology books, the low number of cases with typographical, fantasy, and

traditionalist styles made them be removed from the total styles. The relationship between form and content of the book covers was found to be 78.2%. Table 5 and Chart 4 give the results.

Table 5: Number and percentage of specialized books examined by relevancy and irrelevancy of the cover with the content

Style \ Year	Realist	Modern	Abstract	Total of each year
Total number	295	209	268	772

Number of relevant cases	215	185	204	604
Number of irrelevant cases	80	24	64	168
Percentage of relevant cases	72.9%	88.5%	76.1%	78.2%
Percentage of irrelevant cases	27.1%	11.5%	23.9%	21.8%

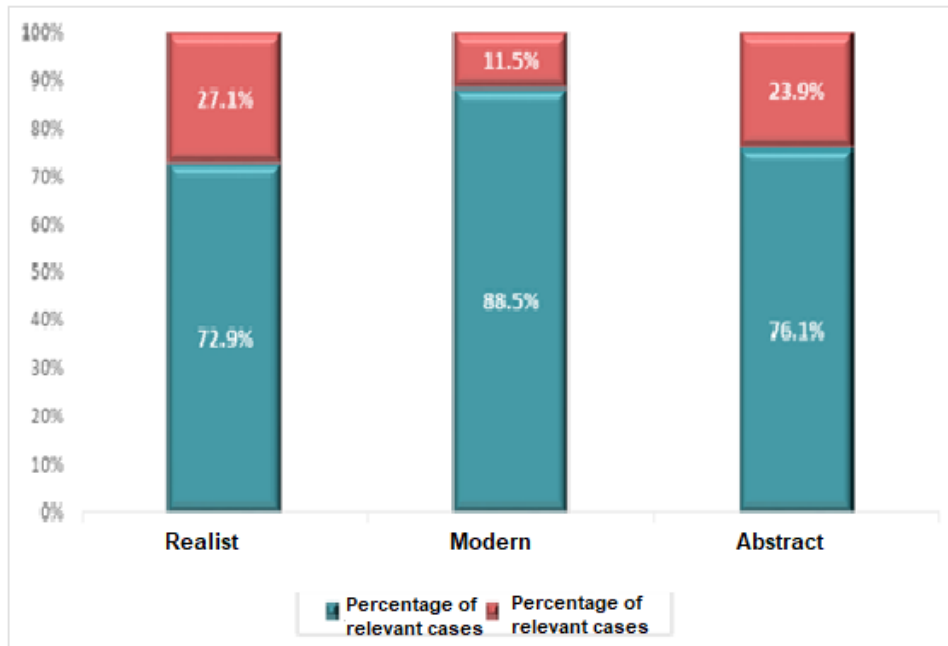


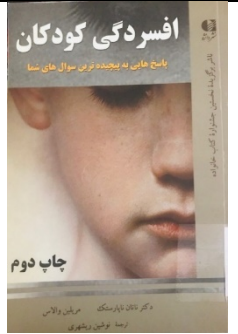

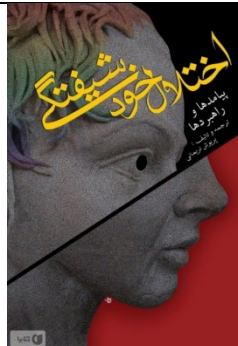



Chart 4: Percentage of relevancy and irrelevancy of specialized book covers with the content by the design styles

This research fully investigated 44 covers of a total of 3045 books gathered. To select the samples, five covers from a total of covers gathered each year had used different visual styles which also had acceptable high-quality designs.

Table 6: Results from visual analysis and relationship between form and content of the selected books

Row	Book title	Main subject	Dominant visual style	Classification	Author	Translator	Publisher	Year of publication	Image of the book
1	Redundant Thinking	Cognitive Therapy	Abstract	Scientific and specialized	Mohammad Jafar Mosaffa	-	Parishan	2008	
2	Motivation and Emotions	Motivational	Abstract	Scientific	Robert Franken	Hasan Shams Esfand Abadi	Ney	2009	

3	Children Depression	Depression	Realist	Scientific and specialized	Nanan Naparstuk, Merylin Wallas	Noushin Reyshahri	Danjeh	2010	
4	Dream Analysis	Unconscious mind	Abstract	Scientific and specialized	Carl Gustav Yung	Reza Rezaei	Afkar	2011	
5	Disorder, self-narcissism, outcomes and strategies	Self-narcissism	Modern	Scientific and specialized	Parivash Narimani	-	Avaye Noor	2011	

6	Facts about Abuse	Mental pressures	Abstract	Scientific and specialized	Markk. J. Kittleson et al.	Kiomors Farahbakhsh, Seyyed Mohsen Ameri zadeh	Avaye Noor	2012	
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Conclusion

With regards to the “relationship between form and content on covers of psychology books”, it was found that modern and abstract covers (i.e., covers tending toward surreal, abstract, and expressionist settings and capable of providing acceptable illustrations of complicated psychological discussions) held the highest success rate to creating an effective relationship between form and content or the work. Fantasy covers usually fell under the popular psychology books, and although these covers accounted for only 7% of the total popular psychology books, they held the highest success rate in creating the relationship between the cover design and the book subject. A large part of the popular psychology books that discuss success and self-help have used the photo of the book’s author which reveals his looking at the user, smiling, and gestures by hand and fingers that could create a sense of warning, assistance, and self-confidence.

With regards to the “classification of cover designs of psychology books”, and “techniques used in cover designs”, it was found that from a visual style perspective, realist, modern, typographical, fantasy and traditionalist styles had been used by designers. Findings suggested that design was mostly oriented to such visual styles as a realist, abstract and modern. From a content angle, the subject, and the target market perspective, the gathered books were divided into two main categories of popular and acceptable and specialized psychology books.

With regards to the classification of gathered covers from a technique perspective, the visual realist style included such techniques as photography with human subjects, photography with non-human subjects, illustration, and painting. The visual abstract style used four techniques of geometric forms and broken lines, semi-abstract and non-geometric forms, which the non-geometric abstract technique was mostly used. The visual modern style involved techniques of photography and photo mixing, illustration, and painting. The visual typographical style used the technique of using letters in the titles that are divided into four categories of typographic letters, calligraphy, free handwriting, and innovative letters. Typographical letters were the most prevalent technique in this style. In visual fantasy and traditionalist styles, illustration accounted for the highest technique used.

With regards to “Visual characteristics of each group of book covers”, it was found that academic and scientific books, specifically specialized psychology book covers had used simple backgrounds with limited colors and a combination of abstract forms or settings similar to the human brain while emphasizing parts of the head and the forehead as symbols of knowledge. The best book covers pertained to scientific and psychoanalytical books. Most of them had used conceptual and abstract concepts using dark and combined colors.

Designers had used visual realist styles of photography with human subjects in designing books with such subjects as educational and psychological principles of adults and self-help; in the meantime, because the said books deal with routine activities of modern life, the styles and techniques used in them were not irrelevant with their content.

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