

# Symbolic Forms and Expressive Content in the Advertising Poster

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## Abstracts

Symbolic forms embody spiritual values that evoke a communicative dimension in the recipient, linking the past, present, and future. These symbolic forms are described as possessing latent energy that grants them an expressive dimension in addition to their aesthetic appeal. The elements of composition and formation align as technical treatments to achieve a visual identity, reflecting the characteristics of spatial and temporal expression. They indicate the value of knowledge and the diversity of elements, serving as sources of inspiration from which designers draw their ideas and manifest them in meaningful abstraction. Thus, symbolic forms, with their expressive content, become a source of guidance and communication, acting as links that transcend generations.

Keywords: form, symbolism, expression, content, design, poster, advertisement.

## 1. Introduction

### 1-1: Research Problem:

Symbolic forms are elements of design that inherently carry intellectual content, serving as expressive tools to embody the themes of advertising posters. These posters act as a medium for promotional activities, relying on the skill to innovate ideas, techniques, and methods of execution according to intellectual and practical approaches, achieving the communicative goals of advertising. The advertising poster has become an essential part of contemporary human life, shaping emotions, thoughts, and orientations, whether the purpose is promotional, commercial, cultural, or scientific. Given the importance of advertisements today and the needs of individuals for them, this research aims to examine some advertising designs that lack visual treatments impacting their expressive content, focusing on symbolic forms, including those with cultural and historical significance. The research problem is encapsulated in the following question:

- What are the symbolic forms of expressive content in the advertising poster?

## 1-2: Significance of the Research:

The significance of the current research is manifested in the following:

1. The endeavor to reveal the expressive dimension of symbolic forms through advertising content in local posters.
2. Identifying the artistic characteristics of symbolic forms and outlining their priorities in design, enriched by the cultural and intellectual content they carry, thus enhancing the local designer's knowledge in addressing new and contemporary topics and augmenting the expertise of designers and professionals in this field.

## 1-3: Research Objectives:

The research aims to:

- Unveil the symbolic forms of expressive content and their applications in the advertising poster.

## 1-4: Research Scope:

The research is confined to the following boundaries:

1. Subject Boundaries: The study of symbolic forms of expressive content in the advertising poster.
2. Temporal Boundaries: Printed advertising posters from the period between 2018 and 2021.
3. Spatial Boundaries: Advertising posters in Iraq (Ministry of Culture and Information) (Baghdad).

## 1-5: Definition of Terms:

- Operational Definition: Symbolic Forms: These are compositional formations with expressive, aesthetic, and functional dimensions characterized by profound meanings that represent a specific identity.
- Operational Definition: Expressive Content: This is the formal content resulting from the construction and assembly of elements in design relationships aimed at revealing the semantic meaning to convey the visual message to the recipient.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2-1: Theoretical Background: Symbolic Forms and their Structural Characteristics in Design:

Firstly, the Concept of Symbol and its Expressive Significance: Symbols and logos represent visual communication signs and typographic elements through which meanings are conveyed from the sender to the receiver. They are used in the communication process with various arts and techniques, often aiming to connect the sender and receiver to perform a specific function within human activity. A symbol is defined as "a visual communicative means carrying a meaningful and readable message for the purpose of communication, notification, and dialogue.

It is also a subject of aesthetic contemplation directing the viewer's gaze towards an intended semiotic result, i.e., towards directed visual understanding" (Radi, 2016, p. 119). They achieve communicative functions that are both intrinsic and objective within the design environment, which are (Al-Nadi, 2011, p. 65):

- 1- Clarity, leading to prominence and increasing value in memory.
- 2- Ease of recall, leading to increased communicative value through symbols with clear connotations.
- 3- Ease of practical application as an effective advertising message within the communication medium.
- 4- Creating a pleasant atmosphere for the advertisement through objective applications of elements achieved in advertising design.

Communication value is seen as an intrinsic aspect of symbols through connotation and expression, as well as through the meanings, information, and symbolic expressions indicated by objective forms in design, with virtual forms varying in existence between reality and imagination and based on objective design relationships achieved through advertising.

Secondly: Symbols and their Role in Ancient Civilizations: The symbol represents an expression of civilization, religious beliefs, social systems, and cultural, intellectual, and philosophical levels that all feed into the designer's thinking. Ancient Iraqi art was characterized by symbolism, abstraction, and nature or realism, which varied from one civilization stage to another. In a civilization stage, the distinctive feature became reduction, abstraction, and simplification of designs to the utmost degree for the aesthetics of advertising design, moving to another civilization stage where advertisements appear realistic or natural with a general abstract touch (Shakht, 1988, p. 56). The imagery themes were diverse, including religious processions, offerings, battles, hunting scenes, animals and mythical creatures depicted symbolically, and scenes of depicting wild and domestic animals. The beauty of the Sumerian mirror stemmed mainly from emphasizing the symbolism of fertility, which could be attributed to by presenting the mirror as a symbol of the mother goddess (Hassam, 1999, p. 37).

Thirdly: Symbolism in Islamic Art: Islamic beliefs influenced the civilizations of other peoples, as they did with Arab civilization, through the extension of this influence to include aesthetic and artistic theories of those peoples. It is a symbolic expression consistent with the spirit of Islamic beliefs in embodying its departure from reality. In Islamic civilization, the artwork "should not be a faithful mirror of the visible world, but a special world of shapes and colors governed by an internal artistic logic and a delicate connection that transcends the individual features produced by each country and era" (Al-Shams, 1985, p. 8). Common themes include plant, geometric, and animal forms, as well as calligraphic writings, through the rotation and continuous movement of shapes and their repetitive qualities, reflecting the relationship between the visible and the invisible (Al-Amiri, 1998, p. 55).

Fourthly: Symbolic Forms and Expression: The use of symbolic forms and their expression in the advertising poster to communicate with others, indicating and expressing meaning, has become a powerful force. Designers resort to using them in design formulations for elements,

adding aesthetic and functional value to the advertising idea and its expression. The designer embodied the expression through various methods and through different advertising and promotional means to form output methods that contribute to influencing and acceptance by the recipients. In other words, expression in the advertising poster is an influential expression. There are expressive and output means that are effective in embodying expression in the advertisement, which the designer uses, including (Thani, 2007, p. 40):

1- Image: The image is an expressive element in advertising used by the designer in the design space to express a content, meaning that the image is an expressive content relying on stimulating the recipient psychologically and sensually towards the directed idea or content.

2- Style: The design system consists of three basic elements: first, the formal structure; second, the external appearance; and third, the design work. This is achieved through expressive ability in conveying ideas possessed by the designer to be included in the design text, requiring the perception of the outside world, meaning "the concepts represented by the nature of perceived mental concepts about the external world, as concepts may be related to sensory things or concepts" (Al-Dibaa, 2009, p. 47).

## 2-2: The Second Topic: Symbolic Forms and their Expressive Use in the Advertising Poster:

Advertising is an indispensable visual communication tool in today's era, encompassing various economic activities such as industry, commerce, services, and more. The use of modern techniques has contributed to the spread of advertising messages, defining it as "a non-personal means of conveying ideas or goods and services by an identified sponsor and paid for" (Abu Dabasah, 2012, p. 18). Posters, in their execution and elements, often possess artistic value (Posters exhibit a variety of graphic art forms and effects, reflecting classical, realistic, modern, or symbolic concepts, among other contemporary designs. This makes advertising posters and their impact significant in promoting taste and general artistic awareness, as they have the ability to engage the viewer's imagination and stimulate aesthetic sensibility) (Hoye, 1978, p. 23). Here are some factors that help attract attention:

1- The size and space of the advertisement: Studies have shown that "the larger the advertisement, the more attention it attracts" (Abdullah, 1988, p. 10). Large advertisements are more attention-grabbing than small ones because the idea in a larger advertisement is often clearer, and a larger ad increases the likelihood of being noticed.

2- Contrast and novelty: What most attracts the viewer is the presence of things that differ from what they are accustomed to seeing or hearing. "Breaking away from the familiar tends to stimulate people, and stimulation leads to the greatest share of their interest" (Al-Jawhari, 1987, p. 185).

3- Motion and liveliness: Dynamic and fast-paced movement in expression is more powerful in attracting attention. "Movement, in its various forms, is linked in the viewer's mind to delivering powerful advertisements that attract attention using all the auditory and visual effects" (Qatarani, 2017, p. 9).

4- Prominence: By presenting and dominating the advertising content to a certain degree of contrast for the viewer's perception, rapid attachment of the subject to memory can be achieved.

This can be achieved by "converting shapes and figures into three-dimensional graphics as seen in modern outdoor advertising" (Ma'alla, 1993, p. 15).

5- Surprise factor: A good advertisement is one that uses an element to stimulate one of the senses, especially sight and hearing, surprising the recipient and prompting them to pay attention to what is contained within.

Secondly: Symbolic forms in advertising design:

The ability to use symbolic forms in advertising design is to express feelings, emotions, and needs. The symbolic function in advertising is a significant sign in building its two-dimensional system. "Encoding is a distinctive feature for the designer to express his aesthetic sense through artistic language, aesthetic creativity, and engage in virtual constructive experience. Therefore, the symbolic function is the distinctive property of the designer" (Dascal, 1987, p. 36) as it represents a culture of symbolic forms in history, imagination, language, and thought. "The symbol is considered a form of artistic creativity, aiming to express the general meaning of the advertisement poster, associated with artistic and aesthetic formulation as a means of achieving visual response to the meaningful form designed for a functional purpose. The value and status of the symbol are linked to the extent of its achievement of this goal" (Alexander, 1979, p. 16). The keys to symbols reveal to us the nature of the designs that provide us with answers about the reality of these advertising posters. "For some civilizations, the circle can symbolize the egg, indicating the sacred symbol of the universe in which all worlds and living beings were born" (Zaki, 1975, p. 23).

2-3: Indicators of Theoretical Framework: In light of the theoretical framework presented, the most important indicators are as follows:

1- Symbolic shapes represent a non-specific intellectual direction that allows the differentiation of the design subject from others of a similar nature. This relies on images (human, animal, plant) to present new ideas characterized by creativity, relying on imaginative methods, creative skills, and accurate information.

2- The necessity of building the design within the criteria and dimensions of (significance and expression) to determine the components and elements despite contradictory differences in the content's capacity as content and innovative production through linking thought to the creative cognitive process.

3- Symbolic forms, whether realistic or imaginary, are subject to merging techniques based on the output of advertising conceptualizations that embody the intellectual content of the vocabulary.

4- The construction of elements and the results of relationships derive their semiotic data from the effectiveness of shapes and spaces linked according to the level of the relationship of the part to the whole, giving continuous and interactive dynamics to achieve stylistic specificity through the presence of dominance and highlighting of the most important elements.

5- Symbolic forms excel in creating movement, whether illusory, implicit, or interactive, to achieve an aesthetic idea characterized by clear vision, involving effects that provide specific meanings, symbols, and connotations, displaying visual identity.

6- The use of graphic elements such as images, symbols, drawings, and textual material as fundamental elements in building the advertisement design to create excitement in the recipient comes through cultural, historical, and religious aspects, whether directly or indirectly.

### 3. Research Methodology

3-1: Research Method: The researcher adopted the descriptive method with sample analysis as it is the appropriate method for the current research topic to achieve the research objective.

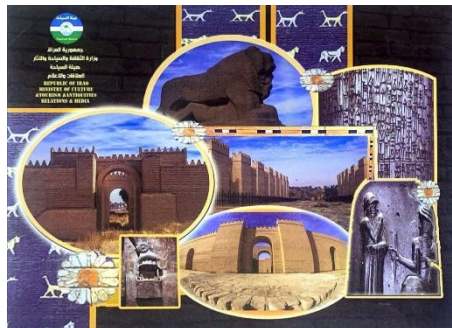
3-2: Research Population: The research population consisted of (12) samples of advertisements from the Tourism and Antiquities Authority affiliated with the Ministry of Culture and Arts in Iraq for the period from 2017 to 2018, according to their sequence. This was based on the following justification (as they contain symbolic forms and expressive content in the advertising poster).

3-3: Research Sample: The purposive method was used in selecting the sample according to the research requirements, where (3) models were selected to represent the research population, representing 25%.

3-4: Research Tool: The analysis axes (Primary Analysis Form) were adopted (see Annex 1), and the research tool was constructed based on the indicators of the theoretical framework and what the theoretical framework provided.

3-5: Tool Validity: The researcher presented the form in its initial format to a group of experts (see Annex 2) and specialists in the field of graphic design. Agreement was reached on the validity of its vocabulary after making some modifications.

3-6: Sample Analysis:



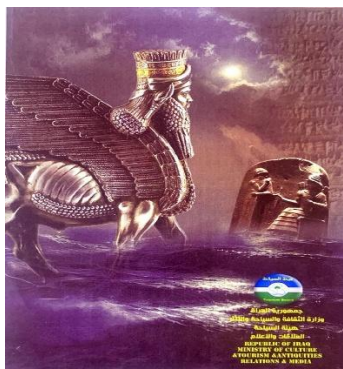
The analysis of the first sample, an advertisement for the Tourism and Antiquities Authority in 2017 titled "Civilizational Symbols," reveals several key points:

1. Symbolic Forms and Structural Characteristics in Design: The advertisement includes six photographic images on a black background, representing historical landmarks from the city of Babylon. The shapes of the photographs varied, some oval and some rectangular, all framed in yellow. In the top left corner, there is a logo consisting of three colors: white, green, and blue, representing the Iraqi Tourism and Antiquities Authority. The images depict animal shapes on a wall, a drawing of the Babylonian lion, a picture of an archaeological cave, a wall with cuneiform inscriptions, a depiction of the sun god handing over the law to Hammurabi, and images of ancient palaces from the Mesopotamian civilization.

2. Employment of Realistic Images for Expressive Content: The use of realistic images aims to convey an expressive content based on the fundamentals of a series of creative artistic communications, deeply rooted in the artistic heritage passed down through generations. These images carry values and aesthetic dimensions that relate their forms to the construction of the communicative model, encompassing human, animal, and botanical elements. However, the lack of symbolic and graphic symbols in the model negatively affected the clarity of some of the advertisement's content and its surrounding themes.

3. Symbolic Forms and Their Expressive Use in the Advertisement: Drawing inspiration from historical and cultural vocabulary depends on the idea of the subject as the basic premise for presenting the expressive content that stimulates the recipient's perception of the advertising message. The collage technique was used in the advertisement, as the designer relied on designing the image using Photoshop by merging more than one image of a historical and touristic landmark into a single image. This positively contributed to enhancing the cultural aspect of the country, in addition to rooting the social unity of the components of the Iraqi people through including different landmarks representing various regions of Iraq, symbolizing social unity. Furthermore, the symbolic value conveyed by these symbols to tourists has economic benefits for the country, as they are an important and clear attraction factor economically and symbolically.

4. Conclusion: The design concept of this model was characterized by direct realism, which added a sense of monotony to the overall advertising composition. However, the advertisement effectively utilized symbolic forms to convey historical and cultural significance, aiming to attract tourists and promote the cultural heritage of Iraq.



### Sample 2, an advertisement for the Tourism and Antiquities

Authority in 2018 titled "The Winged Bull," consists of three photographic images representing the ancient Iraqi mythological creature "Lamassu," symbolizing the protective spirit. The designer made the Lamassu the dominant element on the right side of the design, larger than the other images, as it symbolizes four elements: courage represented by the lion, strength by the bull, glory by the eagle, and wisdom by the human. Additionally, there is an image of the sun god handing over the law to Hammurabi and a wall with cuneiform inscriptions on the top right of the design, resembling a cell or a space, and a blend of images on a background of sea, sky, and sun. At the bottom right of the design, there is a logo representing the Tourism and Antiquities Authority.

1. **Symbolic Forms and Their Structural Characteristics in Design:** This tourism advertisement relates to the type of symbolic references. Natural and animal symbols were employed to achieve a greater degree of the tourism advertising message using unconventional artistic methods. The use of animal symbols was distinctive, carrying symbolic meanings between human and animal, which was most appropriate for expressing the idea of the advertisement, which combines fantasy and reality. However, the lack of clarity in symbolic and graphic symbols contributed negatively to the unity and coherence of the theme.

2. **The Use of Symbolic Forms in the Advertisement:** Symbols and historical and mythical characters were employed within the priorities of the subject and its significance related to the communicative aspect of the advertisement. They represent the tourism advertising message and employ symbols and historical characters to achieve the communication process through various contents and forms. The aim was to introduce tourists to the history and origins of the symbolic references in the advertisement design. The placement of symbols in the advertisement aims to convince the recipient indirectly, affecting the recipient's emotions.



### Sample 3, an advertisement for the Tourism and Antiquities

Authority in 2018 titled "Sun God," is a promotional poster for the country's most prominent tourist landmarks. It features a single image, including statues of Nefertiti and Akhenaten, as well as Abu Jafar Al-Mansur in Baghdad, in addition to an image of the eagle's head representing the protective spirit of the Sumerians.



1. **Symbolic Forms and Their Structural Characteristics in Design:** The advertisement employed visual symbolic representations, notably the image of the eagle's head representing the protective spirit from the temple of Ninurta of the Sumerian civilization. However, what weakened the symbolism of the image on Iraqi civilization was the use of the images of Queen Nefertiti and Akhenaten, which are part of a non-Iraqi civilization, the Pharaonic civilization. This significantly weakened the function of the image as a symbolic symbol. Additionally, it lacked typographic and graphic elements, which negatively impacted the construction of the advertisement. This was compounded by the weak use of drawing programs like Photoshop in distributing and merging the images.

2. **The Use of Symbolic Forms in the Advertisement:** The shapes aimed to define some of the parallel repetitions in directing the cultural significance through the wrong diversity of images symbolizing non-Iraqi civilizations. This had a negative impact on the social and, consequently, economic aspects due to its weak symbolism. The concept of the poster took on a realistic character to express symbolism, but it was tinged with a touch of imagination by placing the images as if in a mythical vessel, giving a positive spiritual character to the recipient. However, it lacked technical treatment in focusing on a single focal point.

#### **4. Results, Conclusions, Recommendations**

##### **Results**

1. All samples lacked typographic symbols with functional connotations for the nature of the advertisement.
2. The imagery was positively employed as symbolic symbols in all samples, except in sample 3, where the designer failed to choose symbolic images of Iraqi civilization, instead opting for symbols of other non-Iraqi civilizations (Egyptian).
3. All samples lacked appropriate use of symbolic graphics, which negatively affected the advertisement's function.
4. In sample 1, the image distribution was successful using the collage technique in Photoshop, with careful and coherent integration. However, the rest of the samples lacked proper image distribution in the poster, following considerations of balance, symmetry, and visual weight.
5. All samples lacked professional light and color treatments specific to design programs like Photoshop and Corel.
6. All samples contributed to the development of the social, cultural, and economic aspects to some extent, while sample 3 failed to do so due to its adoption of images from foreign civilizations.
7. All samples were characterized by a relative realistic nature, containing images representing sculptures depicting activities or activities of ancient civilizations. The imaginative aspect was relatively evident in sample 3 through the image of the mythical protective spirit deity.

### Conclusions:

- 1- The utilization of typographic symbols enhances the concept of the advertising poster, such as the image title, the poster theme, or the geographical location of the sculpture.
- 2- The image's symbolism in advertising posters enhances the effectiveness of the advertisement, as it indicates and alludes to the nature and type of the archaeological monument, in addition to enhancing its attractiveness.
- 3- Some visual symbols play a significant role in the guiding aspect of the basic plans for archaeological areas.
- 4- Clarity in the advertising idea of archaeological posters enhances the social aspect of the peoples referred to in the poster, in the historical and contemporary aspects.
- 5- Heritage posters, with the correct use of symbolic icons, contribute to enhancing the cultural aspect for the recipient through two aspects: the first aspect is specific to the Iraqi recipient, as it contributes to authenticating the cultural aspect of his civilization, and the second aspect is specific to the foreign tourist by enhancing the important role of Iraqi culture. This is what the advertising poster does.
- 6- Realism mixed with a touch of imagination or legend in constructing the poster's idea adds a kind of excitement and desire to experience the archaeological adventure.

### Recommendations:

- 1- Focus on promoting domestic tourism in Iraq, as it contributes successfully and effectively to raising the country's cultural, social, economic, and commercial levels by disseminating motivational and inviting posters.
- 2- Conduct workshops focusing on the design aspect of posters for ministries related to cultural heritage.
- 3- Work on cementing the intellectual dimensions of symbolic forms and their expressive relationship with designers and individuals in the local community.

### Proposals:

Based on the research findings, the researcher arrived at the following:

- The impact of computer technologies on displaying symbolic forms: a semiotic study in the formal structure of tourism advertising.
- Studying the role of tourism advertising in developing scientific, communicative, and economic aspects in Iraq.

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