

Aesthetic and Functional Features of Book Cover Design

Adina-Lorena Smarandache

Abstract: *The well-known saying “Don’t judge a book by its cover” has become one that most of us use frequently especially in our day-to-day life, reminding us to see past the appearances and, perhaps, to help us become better human beings. As a matter of fact, when it comes to actual books, this phrase could not be more wrong since most of the people do judge a book by its cover. Even though the way a book cover looks may not be the final purchasing decision, it is the first thing that people’s attention is drawn to. The aim of this paper is to present the importance of a good cover for books, the design challenges that have to be overcome when creating the final look of a book as well as the specific features that need to be taken into account when designing a book, whether it is a printed version or an e-book or audio-book, and the differences between them. On the other hand, the ways of designing a book cover that will draw the buyers’ attention to, the ways of promoting a book based on its design and, ultimately, the way of discovering how to design a book that sells will also be explored.*

Keywords: *Books cover, design, design principles, impact on sales.*

1. Introduction

The topic of the paper is book cover design, the features and the concepts used, the importance of the message that is transmitted and finally, the importance of a cover design in promoting a book and its success.

The first part presents both the general and the specific design principles, which must be taken into consideration when designing a book cover. If we were to look at the past, for hundreds of years, the use of the book cover served as a protective device for pages usually made by hand as well as for keeping the pages together by linking them. However, although the cover was a practical object, it did not lack aesthetics, and was always decorated as a tribute to the cultural authority. Even then, the design of a book cover was considered, but it was not designed to market the book itself.

In the second part, the paper will deal with a case study on how successful a book is based on its cover, on the impact of its design on the sales and popularity, but also on how well the cover contributes to the general opinion on the book.

2. Research method

The cover of a book is practically its image, the first thing the reader sees, and the impact it has on the public is a very important one in the purchase decision; this, of course, leads to the product's success. The cover plays a major role in conveying the message and the style of the book, which can be decisive for the buyers' attention.

According to a study conducted by Self-Publishing School, 79% of the respondents voted "yes" when asked if the design of a book cover plays a decisive role in the decision to buy it (<https://self-publishingschool.com/>,

accessed on 3 May 2020). The conclusion in this case is that, in fact, we do judge a book by its cover and it should be no secret these days.

Following this, the study has continued with the aspects of a book's cover that are important to take into consideration when designing one; therefore, some information about a cover's elements, dimensions and, ultimately, design styles has been selected below.

The size of a book and, implicitly, its cover, play a role almost as important as the chosen design. Depending on the style of a book, the genre and the audience to which it is addressed, the book will have different sizes, the most common example being the children's book, in which case the square shape is chosen at the expense of rectangular dimensions - which are also the most common. Of course, there are several standardised sizes that are most often used, but they are by no means mandatory for a book and its cover. However, one of the most popular alternatives is the classic A5 (148 x 210 mm) in the final version.

When it comes to the eBook design, there is no golden rule for cover sizes, as online bookstores require different sizes and e-readers have different resolutions. However, it is important to make sure that the right size ratio is used, based on the requirements of online bookstores and high-resolution images. One of the most popular platforms of this type is Amazon, being very versatile in terms of cover design. Still, there are some recommendations: "The ideal size of the eBook cover is a height: width ratio of 1.6: 1. This means that for every 1,000 pixels in width, the image should be 1,600 in height. To ensure the best image quality, especially on devices with high-definition screens, the image height should be at least 2,500 pixels. The ideal dimensions for cover files are 2,560 x 1,600 pixels " (<https://kdp.amazon.com>, accessed on 12 June 2020).

In the case of audiobooks, the most common format is 3,200px x 3,200px or a 1: 1 ratio (<https://www.audible.com/blog/>, accessed on 5 June 2020). Their covers are most often presented in a square shape like covers

of vinyl records - emphasising that they are in audio format, thus making them easier to differentiate from eBooks.

The mandatory elements of a book cover are on the front cover, i.e. the title of the book and the author's name, and optionally a subtitle or additional information such as "Bestselling author". On the spine of the book, the same information is usually included, sometimes even the publication year, and on the back cover, there will be the blurb, some information about the author and sometimes even reviews, but these are again optional.

There are many definitions for the word design. Some examples would be presented as follows: A discipline that aims at the aesthetic harmonisation of the human environment; a way of presentation (aesthetics) of an item or shape; the external appearance of an object elaborated in accordance with the laws of aesthetics (<https://dexonline.ro/definitie/design>, accessed on 10 May 2020). Design is also defined as an arrangement of lines or shapes created to form a pattern or decoration, according to Oxford Dictionary (<https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/design>, accessed on 10 May 2020).

Because book cover design is a specific type of design, there are some important aspects that need to be taken into consideration. Such aspects are the use of images, the colours and, ultimately, the fonts. All these elements play a very important role in transmitting the right message about the book's genre and main subject.

The popular saying "An image is worth a thousand words" seems to be very true. Images, be they illustrations or photographs, are the most easily recognised elements by the human mind, they are all around us every day and this makes their interpretation much deeper and more detailed than just shapes or words, both rationally and emotionally.

Colours are the ones that influence emotions in most cases, and through colours we can most easily understand what the design conveys to

us. The colours used in a design offer a lot of versatility, but there are some rules to keep in mind that ensure a design is both correct and aesthetic. These rules apply to the manner in which the colours are combined and associated and to the manner needed to find the balance between them.

Ultimately, the font family is one of the most important elements of a book cover. The cover generally has a few words displayed (title, subtitle, author's name), and they have a huge influence on the design and on the reader as well. The fonts chosen for the book cover can improve our design or make it fail (Nipane, 2018).

3. Results

The cover of a book can tell us a lot - consciously or unconsciously -, about what we are going to read. For example, if the cover seems cheap or unprofessional, it will convey that the author does not believe in his/her work enough to invest in its image, concluding that if the publisher or author himself/herself does not believe in the book enough to invest in a qualitative cover, then why should the reader believe in the quality of the words inside?

Commercial design, in its variety of directions and ideas, is reduced to two fundamental principles: the design resembles another one or stands out (Bache, 2018). In most cases, when it comes to the cover image of a book, the first reaction is for the design to stand out, to be unique and "original" because this idea equates "visibility" with "more sales", but this theory is not always valid. In order not to compromise the book, when the cover is created, some research has to be carried out first.

The cover of a book can decide to a very large extent whether it will be bought or ignored by the readers. There are so many books on the market these days and we can no longer rely solely on the quality or originality of the content to make it successful (<https://writingcooperative.com/>, accessed on 24 May 2020). When we are looking for a new reading, whether we go

to a traditional bookstore or to an online bookstore, there are so many options that are presented to us at once that we cannot pay attention to all at once; something draws our attention over another thing and this is the cover design.

As an example of why the cover is a powerful tool for promoting a book, Martin Lake's book series, *The Lost King*, and more precisely, the first volume, *Resistance*, has been chosen. It was first launched in August 2013, both in print and electronic format. In the image below (figure 1), the first and second version of the cover launched on the market can be seen.



Figure 1: Before and after examples of the cover design for *The Lost King: Resistance*

One of the reasons why this book was not successful at the time of the launch is by no means that it is a bad or poorly-written book, but simply because the cover is uninteresting. Its execution was certainly not done in a professional editing programme, the fonts used are not at all attractive and the photo used is of low resolution and poorly lit; also, there is no prominent colour and practically nothing attracts the reader's attention.

The sales of the three books in the series tripled after changing the cover of the first book. Two months later, the cover of the second and third books in the series was changed to match the first, and sales doubled again, from 15 copies sold per month to 54 per month, and then to 96. These numbers represent copies sold after the cover has been restored but without advertising the book or the series of books at all. When the advertising campaigns and the marketing strategies started, the sales took off - in June 2014, 559 copies were sold per month (<https://www.creativindie.com/>, accessed on 30 May 2020). In the image below (figure 2), a record of monthly sales between November 2013 and June 2014 can be seen.

MONTH	RESISTANCE	WASTELAND	BLOOD OF IRONSIDE	TOTAL
Nov 2013	8	3	4	15
Dec 2013	34	11	9	54
Jan 2014	31	10	12	53
Feb 2013	42	28	26	96
March 2013	45	15	20	80
April 2013	90	44	41	175
May 2014	184	88	84	356
June 2014	292	133	134	559

Figure 2: The sales record of The Lost King series

In November 2013, before the cover of the first book was changed, only 8 copies of the first volume were sold, followed by an increase in December 2013 - when the volume with the second version of the cover was published – of three times higher in sales. In the following months, sales

started to increase more and more, reaching a total of 356 copies in May 2014, and in June 2014 - when the series of the books also began to be promoted, they were sold in a total of 559 copies. Thus, no matter how important the cover of a book is in its success, we must not only rely on the offered design, but also on the advertising and on the methods of promoting a book.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be emphasised that both the aesthetic and the functional features of a book cover, as complex as they are, contribute greatly to the finished image of the book in general, as it has the power to influence the book's sales and success.

Following the notions presented, it can be stated that, indeed, the cover of a book plays an extraordinarily important role both in terms of the opinions that readers form about a book, and in the case of influencing their decision to buy it. Also, from the design point of view, it is very important to use elements that suggest and involve the genre of the book and its subject, but also to make sure that the design has a clean and modern look that aligns to the current trends.

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