






Gender Equality in the Posters Designed for Covid 19 Prevention
INTERACTIVE ARTICLE COVER






About the Journal

Journal DOI	https://dx.doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha
Journal Home	www.rupkatha.com 
Indexed by	Scopus  Web of Science: Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI)  DOAJ 
Journal Metrics	CiteScore 2020: 0.2 SJR 2020: 0.162 SNIP 2020: 0.193 JCI 2020: 0.50

About the Issue

Issue	Vol. 14, No. 4, 2022 "Global Anxieties in Times of Current Crises"
Editor	Tirtha Prasad Mukhopadhyay
Affiliation	Universidad de Guanajuato
Issue DOI	https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v14n4
TOC	https://rupkatha.com/v14n4.php 

About the Article

Title	Gender Equality in the Posters Designed for Covid 19 Prevention
Author/s	Ani Atsharyan¹, Tatevik Paytyan², Artashes Melikyan³ & Ashot Baghdasaryan⁴
Affiliation	^{1,2,3,4} National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia, Yerevan
Article DOI	https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v14n4.27 Pages: 1-14
Abstract	https://rupkatha.com/v14n427 
Full-text PDF	https://rupkatha.com/V14/n4/v14n427.pdf 
Article History	First Published: 26 December 2022
Article Impact	Check Dynamic Impact 
Copyright	Aesthetics Media Services 
Licensing	Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 

This Open Access article is published under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. For citation use the DOI. For commercial re-use, please contact editor@rupkatha.com.

Gender Equality in the Posters Designed for Covid 19 Prevention

Ani Atsharyan¹, Tatevik Paytyan², Artashes Melikyan³ & Ashot Baghdasaryan⁴

¹Associate Professor, National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia, Yerevan, ORCID: 0000-0002-1450-6331. Email: ani-acharyan@mail.ru.

²Associate Professor, National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia, Yerevan, ORCID: 0000-0001-7805-3880. Email: paytyantatevik@gmail.com.

³Professor, National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia, Yerevan, ORCID: 0000-0001-8961-5447. Email: artashesmelikyan@rambler.ru.

⁴Professor, National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia, Yerevan, ORCID: 0000-0002-5475-9659. Email: armdesignunion@yahoo.com.

Abstract

Since the Covid-19 irruption in the 2020 designers from all over the world started to concentrate their efforts to increase the awareness of the population through visual methods and prevent the spread of the disease. As the germ itself is invisible to the naked eye, graphic designers created an iconic visual identity 3D image of a particle, which became the widespread inspiration for future propaganda and informational posters. Furthermore, the visualization of the virus particle was not enough to influence the wide scopes of people; thus, the new problem for designers became to make such posters that could reveal virus vs human "relations", taking into account gender characteristics as well. The article consists of analytical research on gender-based graphic design's role in the prevention of viruses throughout history. The main problem is how graphic design projects influence the decrease of the virus spread and how gender equality-centered design contribute to it. First time in the article are presented the basic principles of poster design considered for all genders to present the serious message of the urgent prevention of the virus. In the article are analysed and reviewed the works of designers as well. The significance of the article is emphasizing the importance of gender equality in design visualization to increase the influence of them on people's behaviour.

Keywords: Covid-19, gender equality, pandemic, design, visual communication, poster design, signs.

Introduction

The Covid-19 had changed the lifestyle of the population of the whole planet. People of different ages, genders and nationalities struggle to keep safe. The International Health Organization acts to increase awareness among people about the serious impacts of the virus and dictates methods on how to prevent it. This propaganda is particularly made by visual methods and basically, the

core of the design is the creation of propaganda and informational posters that can be influential for everyone. The virus is invisible; thus, the visual 3D image of it was created by a group of designers. It played a crucial role in the whole graphical approach of the field. Thus, the image mentioned above became the icon of the virus and the inspiration for all designers over the world. As the virus image became a widespread appealing identity of the particle, designers started to create propaganda, informational posters or visual communication signs on its basis.

Furthermore, most of the famous design agencies concentrated their efforts and creativity to prevent the virus transfer and to increase awareness. Though, the virus concerns various countries, with different traditions, religions, culture, but the graphic design approach is mainly leaning on the first 3D iconic image development. In addition, some researches reveal that graphical shapes and colour palette that was basically used for the Covid-19 posters design is also general; thus, it was taken into account the community of interests of different gender perception. Virus particle icon in a combination with people silhouettes is the main core of the posters, but it is important to consider how to transfer information to the audience by the shortest method and to choose the gender of acting characters in the posters to make it more influential (Amorim, Teixeira, 2020).

Thus, the visual messaging of health posters is based on several important principles that make them more appealing to the wide range. Those principles are based on race, gender and class equality in designing visual elements. Thus, a person of any gender, race and class must feel the message of a poster as if it is specially designed for them. It is also of higher importance to transfer information to the audience, encouraging them to trust medical sources.

In addition, there have been made some studies to define the awareness percentage of people which reveal that the greater part of some countries has a higher level of knowledge about the virus spread and prevention. Though the research reveals that most of the aware people are well educated, thus design nowadays must work better to increase the awareness of wider scopes.

Methods

The study is made by content analysing-based methods with a categorized comparative technique. The scope of the article encompasses gender-based graphic design's role in the prevention of the Covid-19: particularly through informational, propaganda posters and visual communication signs. The analysis involves the graphical items designed for the most popular health organizations and are widely used all over the world.

Based on the examples reviewed, two major categories had been viewed: the kind of posters and the graphical representation. In addition, the target audience: for whom the design was made had been analysed in a comparative approach. The basic elements of graphic design like colour combinations, saturation, typography, structure and complexity of the composition are presented in comparison as well.

In addition, parallels are driven by posters designed for adults and children. The differences and generalities of the design approach based on different age and gender perceptions are discussed as well.

Historical background

It is not a secret that the transfer of information is more effective to do by visual methods than in written forms, because graphical illustrations can be accepted and easily perceived by people of different nationalities, ages and levels of knowledge. Furthermore, history reveals that far before the Covid-19, health organizations were strongly leaning toward those methods. Posters' design role increased since the early 1900s and strong messages concerning health, are meant to help prevent the spread of disease by them (Buesa, Pérez, Santabárbara, 2021).

To demonstrate the evolution of graphic design in the medical field through history and to discuss gender equality features in it, the examples of posters dedicated to different diseases are analysed below. As the Spanish pandemic spread in 1918 and 1919, face masks became widespread nowadays, to help in preventing the spread of the disease, but many people were refusing to wear them. Thus, many posters and informational illustrations had been drawn to increase awareness and emphasize the importance of following the safety rules. The styles of the most widespread posters of that decade were mainly based on the combination of monochrome realistic illustrations and contrasting hierarchic fonts. The examples of illustrations connected to virus prevention show that in the 1918s design was basically leaning on man as the main acting character (Canales, 2020). Seemingly, at the time when those illustrations were created, gender equality was not at the highest level; thus, as the examples below show, the young man is at the centre of both compositions. In the first example, the structure of the poster is divided into text blocks of different colours to dictate the sequence of information perception. A young man with well-brushed hair closes his nose with a napkin to prevent infection. The second illustration from a magazine is also based on male-centred design: the portrait of a young man, whose face is covered by a mask. Thus, we can conclude that in the 1918s male characters were more used in virus posters and illustrations (See figure 1).

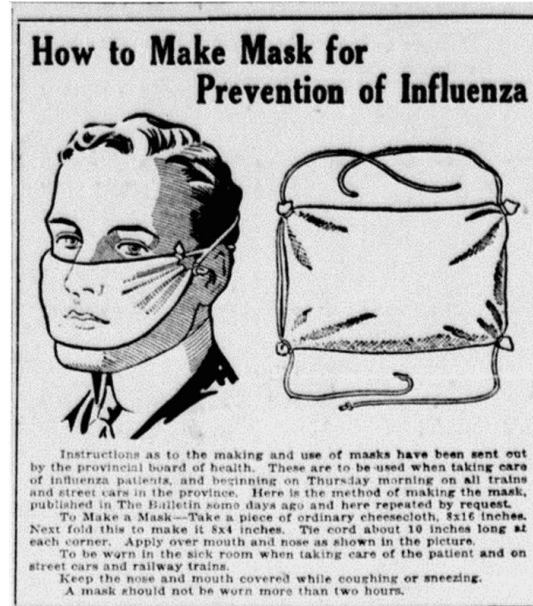
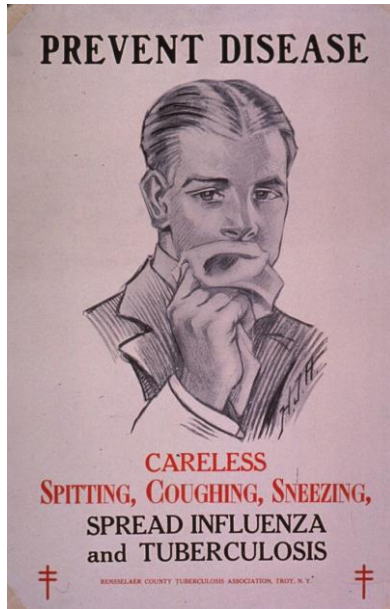


Figure 1.

a. A poster distributed by Rennselaer County Tuberculosis Association in New York in 1918. (National Library of Medicine)

b. A newspaper clip from 1918. (Edmonton Bulletin)

On the other hand, woman characters appeared in posters connected with the prevention of Tuberculosis. The examples of posters and illustrations below show that female has an important role as a protector, mostly wearing nurse clothes and helping people. To make posters more influential most of the posters show how women in healthcare outfit protect children (See Figure 2).



Figure 2.

a. Do protect your children against tuberculosis, 1917

b. A nurse watching children playing outdoors, 1917

c. Poster for the Fight against Tuberculosis, 1930

It is important to note that childish characters were used in posters since the early 1917s. People usually perceive information concerning kids with more sense. Thus, posters with children are considered more influential. The example of a poster with a cute child portrait shows how responsible we should be to save lives (See Figure 3).

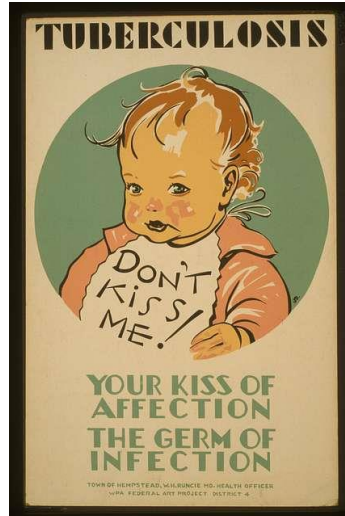


Figure 3. Tuberculosis Don't kiss me! Your kiss of affection - the germ of infection, 1936 -1941

Health organizations transferred information about the prevention of such serious diseases as Malaria, also by influential propaganda posters. The posters presented below reveal how the style of the design approach has been changed in comparison with previous ones, as they have more geometrical structure, firm colour combinations and creative approach which has been widely used to emphasize the whole threat of illnesses. The main character of the posters is the Malaria mosquito, which bites humans. In those posters men are the main figure, who is bitten and harmed by the mosquito (See Figure 4).

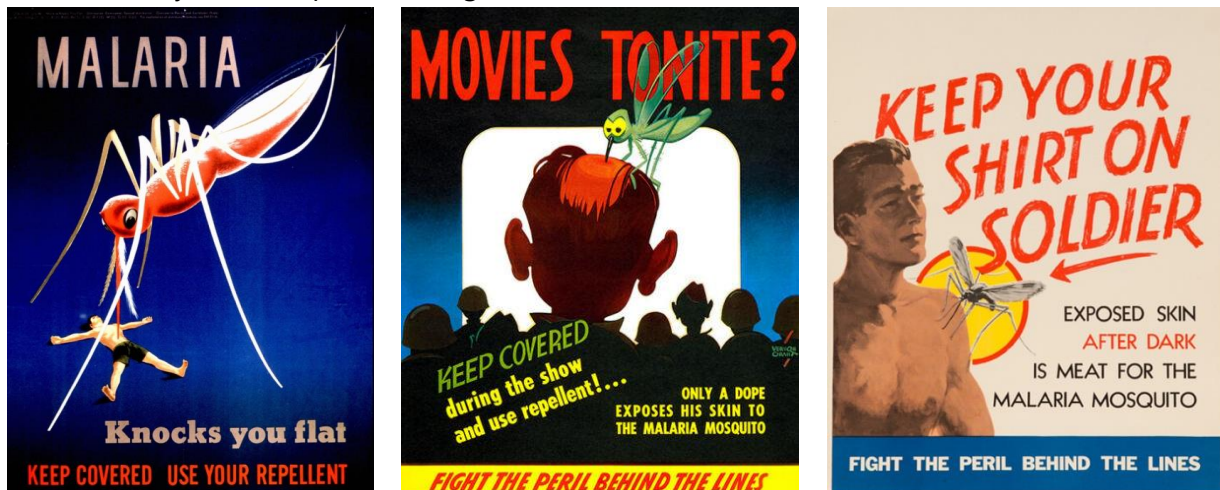


Figure 4.

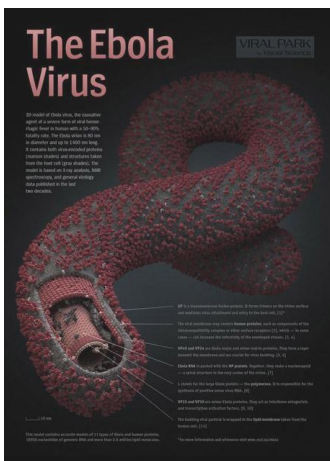
a. Malaria Knocks You Flat, 1944

b. Movie Tonite - Malaria Mosquito, 1944

c. Keep your shirt on soldier, WWII Healthcare Poster, 1943

The posters discussed above revile that both male and female genders are used in design, but the roles of the characters differ. Men are mostly presented in the process of protecting themselves; on the other hand, women are drawn protecting others.

Later, in the 2000s, the Ebola virus became a real threat to humanity. As digital technologies had been developed through those years, the approach and style of Ebola prevention posters also changed. In addition, a wide range of digital opportunities allowed designers to create posters both in 2D and 3D methods. Thus, the development of technology gave the opportunity to use in posters design invisible gems of viruses. As a result, the main character of the composition of such posters became a virus itself, with a horrifying appearance. Those posters are also influential as they directly transfer a sense of fare to the audience (See Figure 5).



a. 3D The Ebola virus, 2014

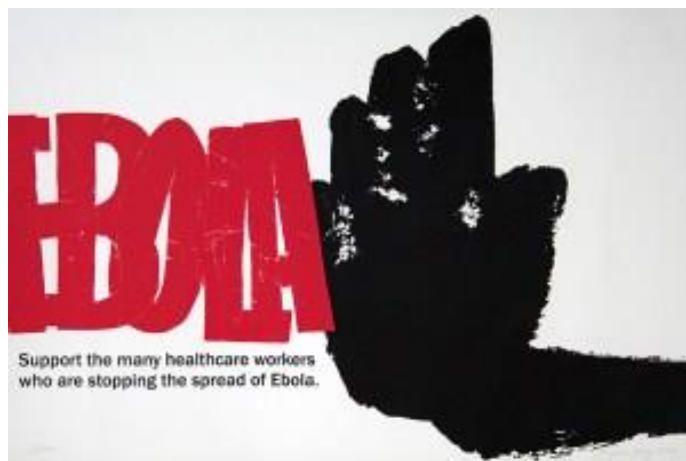


Figure 5.

b. *Ebola: Support the Many Healthcare Workers*, 2014

Overall, the examples presented above show the importance of graphic design in the prevention of viruses and diseases. Year-by-year technological development gives a variety of tools to create such illustrations that would transfer information maximally distinct and influential, to control people's actions and behaviour for the purpose of health safety (Ginny, Roth, 2020).

The first iconic visualization of the Covid-19 particle

Slovenian philosopher and cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek describes the Covid-19 as a "manifestation of a circular structure in which the eventual effect retroactively determines its causes or reasons," which by a "miraculous effect," dictates new standards and possibilities. The global and massive impact, that the Covid-19 eruption made was similar to a mega-event, and several countries around the world changed their rules and even cultural traditions to minimize the risks of infection. As all physical public activities were discouraged or forbidden, life and science parallelly broadened their boundaries in the digital world and it became the exact time to test new technologies and vital systems.

One of the good examples concerning the rise of digital technologies in that period was the visualisation of the Covid-19 virus to increase the impression of fear that it can express. Thus, Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) decided to give it a visual identity. Thus, the team of medical illustrators at the CDC started their efforts to create an iconic visualization of a particle. The team members Dan Higgins and Alissa Eckert, who are medical illustrators, worked with scientists to learn the basic structure of the virus, which measures 125 nanometres in diameter.

Though it was a hard task for illustrators to create a graphical icon without any visual reference, they succeeded to make a worldwide symbol of the virus, which became an inspiration for the future development of visual communication signs and posters concerning the theme.

The final design of the symbol is a grey 'stony' textured surfaced sphere. S proteins that are attached to the host cells are coloured red and M proteins are coloured yellow. This contrast was chosen to strengthen the alarming impact. In addition, the 3D image was rendered with shadows to make it look as realistic as possible (See Figure 6).

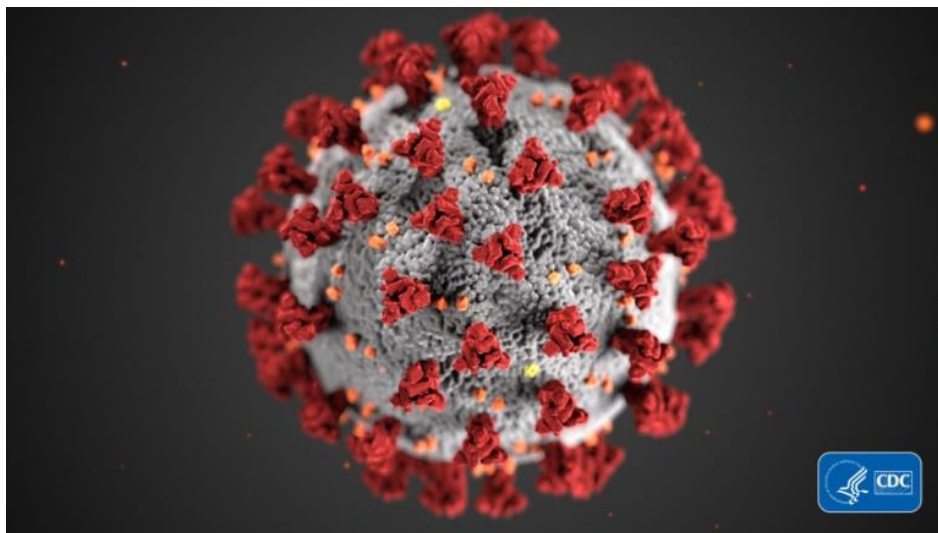


Figure 6. The iconic illustration of the Covid-19 (Dan Higgins and Alissa Eckert (CDC))

Thus, as soon as the 3D image was designed, it became widespread and almost all the posters, visual signs and social media posts concerning the Covid-19, were developed and inspired by it (Hattam, 2021).

Propaganda and informational posters of the Covid-19

To increase population awareness about the severe threats the disease can affect, designers and illustrators offered powerful and heart-touching propaganda posters that deeply influence people's behaviour. The same strategy was developed during previous virus eruptions in the early

1900s. As we have already discussed above, for such serious diseases as Malaria, Tuberculosis etc. propaganda posters were designed by the same methods. The only difference is the development of technology that gives infinite opportunities to modern designers to realize even the most creative and daring ideas.

In addition, as the acknowledgement and apprehension of modern people concerning gender equality increased, the design strategy changed since the 1900s, taking into account nowadays challenges. The more people are engaged, the wider information is transmitted.

Thus, modern designers combined posters design strategies with the knowledge about gender equality and the Covid-19, creating a new approach to the field. As it is presented in the chart below, the poster design process starts with research, defining the problem, preparing a mood board, sketching, conceptualization and visualization (Neves, 2012). This process is made by defining basic problems of gender inequality that can occur during a pandemic (See Figure 7).



Figure 7. Poster design basics in parallels with gender equal strategy for Covid-19 prevention

To understand what are the basics of the Covid-19 poster design, the most popular examples are analysed below.

The Covid-19 preventative propaganda posters

The poster designed by comic artist and illustrator Cat Parra from Madison reflects solidarity and the community spirit, where everyone must feel a responsibility to protect each other. At the bottom of the poster is illustrated the Earth, and just above it in the centre of the composition reveals the personage of a doctor and the other members of community standing behind her. As one can notice the dominant figure of the poster is a woman doctor. This method was widely used during the Tuberculosis pandemic in the 1900s. In addition, in this poster are also presented people of different races and specializations. The purpose of the idea is the increase of poster influence by making anyone find themselves in the composition. One can also notice that the style of the poster has some parallels with the style of retrospective ones. The poster has an interesting structure and influential style (See Figure 8).

The message of the poster designed by visual artist Yeonhee Chenong, from Madison is the war against the Covid-19. It shows the importance of keeping social distance to protect others as well because it is the only effective method to win the war. Portraits of a man and a woman wearing green masks are illustrated in the centre of the poster. The whole background of it is yellow as a symbol of infected air. The green colour is only used on masks and letters to emphasize cleanliness and safety. Though the main colour palette is based on yellow and green combinations, one can easily notice that the poster has gender and race equality message in it. (See Figure 9).



Figure 8. Poster: Despite our distance, we stand united. Together we can defeat the Covid-19



Figure 9. Poster: Social kindness protects others yourself



Figure 10. Poster: To stay at home is to love your country

Propaganda poster designed by Le Duc Hiep from Vietnam includes the message: "To stay at home is to love your country". On the poster healthcare workers wearing facial masks stand like soldiers; in front of them is the slogan mentioned above. The style of the poster is chosen similar

to World war-time posters, to indicate the importance of following the rules and the real threat that a virus can occur. This poster also has a gender equality message, as the figures are presented equally in the centre of the composition, hand to hand ready to defeat the disease. (See Figure 10).

The examples analysed above reveal the whole origin of the Covid-19 posters design and their main style, the aim of which is to stand on an influential and strong propaganda approach. However, the illustrations differ widely from one another, but the purpose is one: to increase awareness and defeat the virus (Wisconsin Historical Society, 2021).

The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic affect everyone around the world. Due to long-standing inequalities, many impacts, including those on health, the economy and the social sphere, are afflicting women, girls and marginalized populations hardest. The crisis is deepening existing inequalities and undermining hard-earned progress on gender equality and women's rights (Ejikeme, Ifeanyi, Ukaogo, 2021).

To decrease those inequalities and broaden awareness among wide scopes, UNICEF designed propaganda posters concerning the theme. Posters designed in pastel colour palettes show everyday life in a visual method that calmly transfers a strong message about gender equality. Most of them are designed in an illustrative hand-drawn style that gives a friendly sense. As the examples below show gender equality can be presented both with human figures and just with other images of the household. These illustrations are presented in a combination with slogans that are mainly written in red and are highlighted throughout the whole composition (See Figure 11).



Figure 11. Gender equality posters. UNICEF

Overall, the posters analysed above give a message about the importance of distributing care and domestic tasks equally among men and women in the family. They touch on such a serious problem, as violence is never an adequate response to differences of opinion, to stress, or to any other factor. In addition, to encourage people to take advantage of this time to teach boys, girls and adolescents about people who have fought for equality among men and women (Griffin, 2015).

The Covid-19 informational posters

To prevent the spread of the virus health organizations decided to increase awareness by designing powerful informational posters as well. The basis of such posters is leaning on simple iconic compositions and text. To emphasize the importance of informational-educational posters, some of them are analysed below.

The informational posters designed by different world organizations have a generally simple design, which consists of strict illustrations and notes. Such posters have open access to download and print, offering a wide range of sizes and resolutions. Thus, they are widely spread all over the world. These posters have mostly cool colour combinations as bluish and greenish shades take up the majority of the design, but to contrast and highlight important points, warm colours are also used. Generally, in these posters gender and race equality are also taken into account, because the cartooned silhouettes and illustrations of main acting figures differ by gender, race and nationalities. This method is again used to increase their influence of them on wider scopes (See Figure 12).

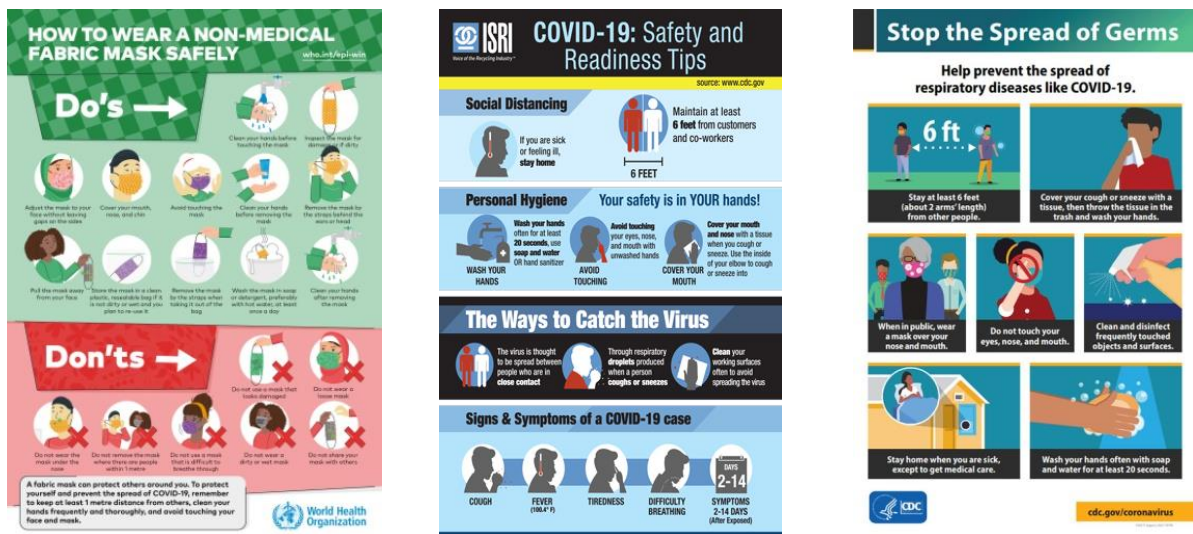


Figure 12.

a. How to wear a Covid mask
(poster, World Health Organisation)

b. Safety and readiness tips
(poster, Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries)

c. Stop the spread of germs
(poster, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

The Covid-19 informational posters for children

The design style of informational posters for children differs widely from the general ones, as such posters mostly have a child-friendly approach. The purpose of them is to keep children aware of the harm that the virus can cause with less text information and a non-threatening or stressful manner. Thus, their main structure of them is based on cartoon-like illustrations of heroes

defeating the virus. The colour combination is less strict than in general informational posters, as bright colours are dominating here. In addition, children of different nationalities and genders are mostly illustrated to increase their interest and to engage them in the important process of virus prevention. Children are often illustrated as heroes, who can defeat a virus by washing hands, keeping a safe distance, etc.

The posters designed by the CDC are also free to use to help raise awareness about hand washing in highly visible public areas, such as schools, workplaces, and restrooms. They are designed for all audiences (See Figure 13).



Figure 13. Posters to increase the importance of handwashing among children (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

However, the graphic style of children-friendly posters differs from that of general ones, but the structure and purpose are the same. In addition, the colour palette is also similar. The most obvious difference is the contrast of colours, which is more saturated for children than that the general ones.

CONCLUSION

Overall, it can be concluded that, despite the varieties of nationalities, traditions, cultures, gender, race and age, visual communication methods concerning prevention and awareness increase of the Covid-19 are mostly similar. The parallels between disease prevention propaganda posters of the early 1900s and the Covid-19 posters revealed that there are many similarities among them. Many posters of both eras present women as healthcare workers helping men and children to save lives. Though in the Covid-19 posters, gender equality messages prevail as the greater part of such posters show male and female characters equally doing their role to defeat the virus. The same method is used in informational posters as well. The study of propaganda and informational

posters reveals that the simplicity of illustrations, the style of texts and pictograms is mostly general. The only exceptions are connected with child-friendly posters that are less strict and are similar to comic book illustrations to be more acceptable for children. In addition, the analysis reveals that basic colours used in informational posters are cool: generally blue and green, in combination with contrasting warm colours to highlight the message and concentrate the attention of the audience.

The historical background proves that visual language has universal importance, regardless of gender, social, cultural and other factors. Furthermore, it is considered that the information presented in visual methods is easier to perceive by a great percentage of people, despite their literacy. In addition, as the Covid-19 vaccines are widely credited for their role in reducing the spread, severity, and death caused by the disease; new informational and propaganda posters are designed on the basis of the principles that were mentioned above. Though medical posters have been used a long time before, the Covid-19 pandemic posters are the real proof of graphic design's impact on the prevention of the disease and the increase in people awareness. As a result, we can conclude that poster design has an enormous role in that today the virus is almost defeated and the percentage of infected people is low nowadays.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest.

References

- Amorim, J., Teixeira, L. (2020). Art in the Digital during and after Covid: Aura and Apparatus of Online Exhibitions. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*. Special Conference Issue (Vol. 12). <https://dx.doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v12n5.rioc1s1n2>
- Buesa, A., Pérez, J., Santabàrbara, D. (2021). Awareness of pandemics and the impact of Covid-19. *Economics letters Elsevier* (Vol. 204). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2021.109892>
- Ejikeme, J. N. U., Ifeanyi, E. I., Ukaogo, O. C. (2021). Sexual Violence and the Plights of Internally Displaced Persons During the Covid-19 Pandemic Lockdown in Nigeria. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* (Vol. 13, No. 3). <https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v13n3.19>
- Griffin, D. (2015). Posters for public health: WPA posters and national dialogues about health care in the United States. *Communication Design* (Vol. 3). Taylor and Francis. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20557132.2016.1201913>
- Ginny, A. Roth. (2020). Prevention Posters Push the Message. US National Library of Medicine, <https://circulatingnow.nlm.nih.gov/2020/07/09/prevention-posters-push-the-message/>
- Hattam, V. (2021). Visualizing the Virus. *The Journal of the Design Studies Forum* (Vol. 13). Taylor and Francis. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17547075.2020.1869454>
- Neves M. (2012). *Printed Interactivity Towards a New Understanding of Graphic Design*. Taylor and Francis.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/19235003.2012.11428508>

Wisconsin Historical Society. (2021). Covid-19 Poster Project 2021.

<https://wisconsinhistory.org/PosterProject?fbclid=IwAR0iP34M9mgmXwVcaXH0moeU9CDldTmlLdNjOKLGmXN4joB0mcViX9YXd8>

Ani Atsharyan - PhD in Arts, Associate Professor, Lecturer at Design Chair of National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia.

Tatevik Paytyan - PhD in Technical Sciences, Associate Professor, Associate dean of Faculty of Design of National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia.

Artashes Melikyan - PhD in Architecture, Professor, Dean of Faculty of Design of National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia.

Ashot Baghdasaryan - Professor, Head of Design Chair of Faculty of Design of National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia.
