

Problems and Countermeasures of Academic Journal Covers^{*}

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There are some problems in current academic journal covers, such as the unreasonable layout, volume of digital chaos, incomplete information, the proportion between the necessary information and images unmatched, rough cover from uncoordinated production, the lack of continuity of the publication style, and cover color matching unreasonably. According to the normative principle, academic principle, simplicity principle, characteristic principle, certainty principle, aesthetic principle, innovative principle, stability principle, it is necessary to improve the cover design of the academic journals, such as, a reasonable match between the color and the content, the coordination from the front cover to the back cover.

Keywords: academic journal cover, cover design, improved cover design

From a philosophical perspective, the relationship between the content and the styling is a dialectical unity. The content determines the styling, meanwhile the styling interacts with the content, and the contradiction between them consists of their mutual relationship, the same as to the dialectical unified relationship between the content and the styling of academic journals. The styling of the publication should service for the content, and the content of journals shows its meaning by a specific, corresponding styling. Journal covers have some impacts on readers, and even further affect the attention of the readers. Readers get to know a certain journal by their first impression of the journal covers. A high-quality academic journal not only has a high level of contents, but also has a smart design on the cover in line with the characteristics of its contents, in order to give the reader a full range of enjoyment. Although there are some differences between the academic and the entertainment publication, for example, different levels of readership, popular science and entertainment publications pay much attention to the cover design while some academic journal covers are monotonous, obsolete layouts subjecting to the restrictions of traditional ideas, which seems the only way to express academic seriousness.

Problems of Academic Journal Covers

Some people only treat the front cover as a cover, or the second front cover as the cover, which is not comprehensive. Binding in terms of publications, from the front cover to the back cover is two sides of a piece of paper, so the whole meaning of the cover includes the front cover, second front cover, second back cover, back cover and spine. Over the years, the contents of academic journals have been emphasized; however, the cover design has been neglected to a certain degree. There are many problems on current academic journal covers.

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The Irrational Cover Layout

For any academic journals, there is some necessary information on the cover, including the name of academic journal, date, volume and international standard serial number. Among these cover information, the journal name should be placed on the most prominent, the most obvious location, and the size of journal name is greater than the size of the other information. Some academic journal names are too small. In order to emphasize some important articles, some academic journals put the article titles on the cover, but these titles should not be bigger than the academic journal name.

The Confusing Date and Volume

The annual volumes, with date and volume, are their serial and consecutive representation of the production, which is one of the important symbols by their serial representation. It is clear and easy to use a simple Arabic number and the digital number, position, color for readers to identify a certain journal version. However, in order to pursue the artistic effect, some academic journal covers use the arc body art to show the volume number, issue number, and some even put the journal name in the strong background colour, which affects the readers to identify.

Too Much Information in Covers

Some academic journals try to capitalize on the cover to provide readers with much more information, listing a number of award-winning information, even some awards obtaining many years ago, which ignores the fatigue problems of readers. For example: In *Journal of Lanzhou Petrochemical Vocational and Technical College*, there was a list of the outstanding awards on its cover.¹



Figure 1. *Journal of Lanzhou Petrochemical Vocational and Technical College*, 2, 2010.

Images and the Necessary Information in the Discordant Proportion

Admittedly, vivid cover images attract readers; however, the text and numbers are more important than images. So, if the images occupy too much space, the important information for the cover title and serial numbers is designed to be small. For example, some academic journal covers are simply one picture with the cover text and serial numbers in the corner.

Unorganized Cover Information

¹ *Journal of Lanzhou Petrochemical Vocational and Technical College*, 12 (December 2010) [in Chinese].

For some academic journal covers, the date and the volume are separated. For example, an academic journal No. 4, 2008, the 2008 was put in the middle of the cover, but the issue No. 4 was put on the bottom. Between the space of 2008 and issue No. 4 was filled in the other information.²

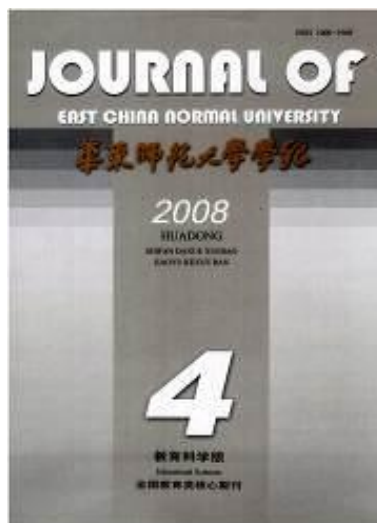


Figure 2. *Journal of East China Normal University*, 4, 2008.

From front cover to back cover, it is covering overall. Covers should be arranged with its continuity logically from the front cover to back cover. Some academic journal covers even publish article contents on the second back or back cover. Some of the second front covers, the second back covers publish the Chinese directory and the English catalogue, conference information,³ which saves layout utilization of the cover, however, obviously affects the overall harmony of the cover.

Rough Cover

In order to save production costs, a number of academic journals use less-qualified paper for covers, which happens for some friendship subscription among universities. As an editor, in the process of reading university academic journals, I often find that some academic journal covers were folded because the paper was too thin.

Lack of Continuity for Publication Style

There are great changes between the current and next version in the cover design and styling. Different styles with fluctuations constantly make it difficult for readers to distinguish the true face of a certain journal, and result in the journal covers' lack of continuity.

Unreasonable Cover's Color

For some academic journal covers, the color of journal name is too close to the cover background, which lessens the visual effect of journal names. Some academic journal covers are colorful, a plum or lotus in a journal cover, causing a departure from the solemnity and seriousness of the academic journals. For example, in *Journal of Anyang Normal College*, the white journal name was put in red background. The red contrasts sharply with the white.⁴ In *Journal of Huzhou Normal College*, its cover was green in the background, with

² *East China Normal University in Education Science*, 4 (August 2008) [in Chinese].

³ *Harbin Railway Science and Technology*, 4 (August 2008) [in Chinese].

⁴ *Journal of Anyang Normal College*, 6 (December 2008) [in Chinese].

bright yellow sunflowers.⁵



Figure 3. *Journal of Anyang Normal College*, 4, 2008; *Journal of Huzhou Normal College*, 5, 2011.

Covers With too Many Similarities

Going into the exhibition hall or library, one may notice the similarities of journal covers. In particular, some university journal covers are monotonous, lacking of the characteristics and uniqueness of their own university. In fact, every university has the function of delivering the beauty, even if the science and engineering universities do not pursue beauty, they could not achieve the distinguished.

Covers With too Much Commercialization

Some journal covers publish commercial advertising, and the advertisement is even bigger than the journal name of the font, which decreases the academy.

The Design Value of Academic Journal Covers

As one of the major medium of international academic exchanges, academic journals play an important role in the promotion of academic research; the quality of the cover design directly contributes to the impression of journals.

Academic Journal Cover Information Is one of the Sources of the Retrieval System

Document retrieval systems are mainly from the publication of the catalog, but some cover information is also part of retrieved data, such as the international searchable database of the SCI (Science Citation indexes Science Citation Index), SSCI (Social Science Citation Index, Social Sciences, the Citation Index), the EI (Engineering Index Engineering, Index) whose information is from covers. A clear and elegant academic journal cover contributes to retrieval increases new idea dissemination, speeding and breadth, improving the publication citation frequency and impact factor, providing a wealth of information for international retrieval systems, increasing the usage of the retrieval systems, stimulating the influence of academic journals.

Academic Journal Cover Information Is the Basis of Ordering

Whether the library's current periodical storage, or archive display, may be involved in the registration, shelving, binding, sorting, and cataloging processing on the basis that the major information is from academic

⁵ *Journal of Huzhou Normal College*, 5 (October 2011) [in Chinese].

journals.

Elegant Academic Journal Covers Attract Readers

In a library or a reading room, readers are firstly exposed to the cover of academic journals. Academic journal covers are closely related to readers, adjusting the visually monotonous and boring may help alleviate the fatigue of readers.

Exquisite Academic Journal Covers Are Conducive to the Spread of Academic Journals

The journal cover design directly affects the audience to the content recognition, goodwill and reputation, as well as the reader affinity.

Principles of Academic Journal Cover Design

Based on my extensive work experience as the editor of *Journal of Tsinghua University*, I believe the following principles could be followed to improve current journal cover design.

Normative Principle

Article 32, Chapter III of the Publication Regulations, released on October 20, 2005 by General Administration of Press and Publication of the Peoples' Republic of China, made clear "put the title, the year, month period, volume in the apparent position of the cover". However, some academic journals in China are not in accordance with the provision about the cover. Of course, according to different cultural habits, each country has different requirements on academic journal covers.

Academic Principle

Academic journal covers should show the academic temperament and cultural connotation of aesthetic factors, which is different from the entertainment publication with colourful covers, on the contrary, they require an impressive, solemn, simple, and generous style.

For example, *Journal of Scholar Publishing* keeps an elegant style on each changing cover; there is a beautiful picture on the cover of *Science, Nature*, which contains significant technological breakthroughs, impressing deeply into the mind of readers. Taking the journal of *Science & Technology Review* as another example, its cover features a major scientific and technological event occurring nearly half of the month at home and abroad; or with an illustration related to an important paper in current issue.

Simplicity Principle

The visual and psychological acceptance of specific regional information is limited, so it is better to use as little as possible elements on the cover. Cover background should be as simple as possible in order to allow for the reader's imagination. As Mies Van der Rohe, one of the world's most famous masters of architecture in the mid-20th century, put it, "less is more".

Characteristic Principle

With the development of human culture, there are a growing number of academic journals, following the criticism, such as low-level repeat, almost 1,000 journals have the same face. Therefore, academic journals should shape their own characteristics, reflecting the regional characteristics, subject characteristics, as well as forming different new academic styles. Characteristics are the power of the academic journal, which stimulates academic journals to develop; unique journal covers are important factors for their own characteristics. The covers of *Journal of Tsinghua University*, *Journal of Beijing Normal University* used the landmark of the

university to display the academic character.

Certainty Principle

Academic journal covers should clearly convey the nature, purpose, and characteristics. Therefore, cover artwork, name, date, volume number, period number of academic journals should not be obscure. Publishing information cannot be ambiguous. The orientation of pictures and numbers should be precise, and especially the boundary among figures should be clear.

Aesthetic Principle

From an aesthetic point of view, the cover design should be consistent with the basic law of graphic design, which is formed by the words, numbers, logos, pictures, texture and color changes, point, line, surface composition, layout, in proper size, shape, proportion, location, design set, with a split screen, color hue, chroma, brightness, color, volume, pigment, etc., in line with a balanced or symmetrical, contrast, background and reconcile the scattered and the echoes of change and unity, rhythm, and rhythm, scale and proportion, beauty of styling rule. Colour matching to the layout of the arrangement is not only consistent with academic contents, but also full of the artistic style of the distinctive personality. The achievements of human civilization are in pursuit of truth, moral, and beauty. As a carrier of human civilization, academic journals should blend truth with the morality and beautify, transmitting of knowledge to people as well as passing on beauty.

Innovative Principle

In current era, the competitive publication and the endless stream of new ideas require the publication to innovate. Innovative academic journals are viable publication. "In today's world, to severe competition and the constant emergence of new thoughts requires journals to innovate all the time" (Wang, 2007, p. 156). As for academic journals, innovation is necessary not only in the publishing contents, the methods and enterprise system, but also in journal covers.

Stability Principle

To enhance the visual effect of the academic journal, the cover design should maintain continuity, but it is not static. With updating every two or three years, it is imperative to properly handle the changing covers. The design of the cover should be updated under the premise reflecting the journal unique style; it is better to consciously retain the back issue cover as part of the iconic contents, such as symbolic patterns, journal's permanent standard, iconic background color which reflect the extension of journal history. For example, *Journal of Tsinghua University* updates the cover but keeps the Bauhinia color because Bauhinia is one of flowers of Tsinghua University.

Countermeasures for Academic Journal Cover Design

Numbers and the Text Are Clear in the Cover

Indeed, different size and font of the text, and the numbers on academic journal covers would have different visual effects, however, in the pursuit of artistic effects, they should be easily identifiable. Many people do not recognize seal and cursive script, which is not suitable for academic journal covers. The fonts of journal name, date, volume number, and period should use traditional computer fonts. Under the premise of easy identification, art fonts could be used.

Reasonable Division in the Cover Region

In the process of using computer graphics to design journal covers, firstly, it is pretty convenient to make

sure the position of the spine. On the front cover, there are the journal name, date, volume number, period, ISSN number, and CN number. Although the above information is complex, it is necessary to make rational distribution on the front cover in order to guide the reader's attention, which shows visual degree of relaxation and gives readers' imagination space.

Coordination from the Front Cover to the Back Cover

For some academic journals, there is a strong colour contrast between the front and back cover; there is too much information on the front cover, while there is less information on the second front and the back cover.

Rational Distribution of All the Necessary Information

It is practical to use mathematical gold split principle, make flat-screen visual elements like academic journal name, date and volume number into a combination of mathematics points, lines.

Matching Different Colors Reasonably on the Cover

From a physical perspective, only the use of light and reflection, objects produce different colours, thereby, the colourful world comes into reality. Different from the best-selling magazine covers, the colours of academic journal covers should be elegant, dignified and serious instead of too gorgeous. The colour contrast, especially the chiaroscuros, not only maintains the color balance, but also keeps the order and different levels of information on the cover. Academic journal covers, with the contrast of warm and cold colors, will be lack of vividness; if there is no color contrast, the cover would be dull.

Recruiting the Cover Design Insights From Text Editors

Different from the pure creative arts, academic journal cover design could not just rely on the virtue of the artistic conception; text editors have comprehensive understanding on the style, nature of academic journals, and should make recommendations to the cover design. The cooperation between creative art and a text editor would reflect the academic journal style from the cover design perspective.

Collecting the Ideas From the Editorial Board, Authors, Readers

Readers not only evaluate the contents of academic journals, they also have their own evaluation about the cover design. Take the journal of *Science & Technology Review* as an example, the editorial board or authors put "Cover illustration on the cover image" on the cover. Practice has proved that, the cover design of *Science & Technology Review* not only takes full advantage of the inherent layout and beautification of the publication, enriches the contents of publications, but has also been appraised by readers (Su, 2009).

Enlisting the Cover Design from the Public

To improve the academic journal cover design, it is practical to put the potential journal covers in the journal or network so as to solicit recommendations from communities or individuals. On June 22, 2011, *Journal of Changzhou Institute of Technology* collected cover designs from the community, and made clear of the design requirements, considerations, and incentives.⁶

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⁶ *Journal of Changzhou Institute of Technology*, 5 (October 2011) [in Chinese].