

Pentecostalism in Contemporary Posters Communication Using Graphic Design Poster Templates As Example

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Abstract. Posters, posters and posters everywhere! Many of the posters seem in open spaces around us are visual announcement of the Christian religion. This is largely due to the proliferation of Pentecostalism, which explicitly necessitates production of posters - visual messages that advertises churches and their activities. This paper is an attempt to guide direction in the brand of Christian religion posters and design presentation. It interrogates the technical knowledge (know-how) of graphic poster designers and the churches as stakeholders; and attests to an uncontrolled indigenous designs approach that is neither here nor there. In the context of formal circle of representation and laws of formal organization, this paper posits for what is proper and acceptable within practice of designing posters for visual communication.

Keywords: Poster Advert, Graphic Designers, Poster Clients, Visual communication, Technical Know-how

1. Introduction

The religious landscape of the Nigerian state is commonly divided along three major groups. They are Christianity, Muslims, and the traditional worshippers, which their conducts vary from one basic practice to another. These three mentioned have some distinctiveness and certain peculiarities of note in their style of worship. However, there are some other similarities that could be associated with them, at least; each one of them is known to converse to a being believed higher than human beings and is revered as divine immortal. From the foregoing,

Christianity is a body that associates with Pentecostalism, and here the premise of this paper.

The coming of Western missionaries into African and Nigeria in particular has in no small way contributes to the influence of Western education and religious revolution among the Christian faithful. This revolution by extension is responsible for how far Christian gospel has been propagated using all available medium of mass communication; both the print and broadcast platforms have been of advantage to reach out to the anticipated audience. A quick example in early Christian practice in Nigeria is the use of handbill leaflet (bulletins) by Rev. Henry Townsend for the purpose of advertisement and inviting the public to church fellowship.

Today, handbills as one form of poster communication have become an integral part of Christian Pentecostalism. Whether in the sizes of A0 or above 15-gauge overhead billboard or (96 – sheet poster known as the “supersite,” Nick Souter in Inyang, (2003, p.253), posters is sure a means to propagate the church publicity and her array of activities. Accordingly, “if there is one thing that overwhelmingly defines the visual landscape of urban Nigeria today, is the church signs that promise material prosperity as a divine mandate,” Asonzeh (2008, p.134). From “DELIVERANCE PRAYER MEETINGS” to “DIVINE PROSPERITY PRAYERS” advertised on two-dimensional surface as a poster serves to present church personalities and other important information dear to these churches. This paper chooses not to dwell in the premises of whether or not to substantiate the flamboyant claims advertised on poster pages; rather it situates

discussions on poster designs structure and ideals of graphic design planning for the purpose of visual communication education. Therefore, it establishes that poster is an integral part of today's churches, and so information structure in posters should be of concern given to reasons that it is a medium of mass communication.

Significantly, posters of all sizes have been used as a non-verbal ground for communication due to its flexibility in disseminating information. And overtime, the effectiveness has made it veritable information reached in many fields of endeavours; politics, sales and marketing, advertising, social and cultural engagements and religious propagation and awareness creation. Even though posters are in ranges of sizes respectively, its essence for information purposes is to reach a target audience or the general public as legible, visible and readable as possible. The obvious is that today's churches propagate the gospel using billboards, handbills, fliers, roll-up banners, vinyl and flex banners and other 2-dimensional formats that can be available. Here, poster is used as a generic word for all aspect of outdoor 2-dimensional visual publication and virtual banners; "or what can be generally referred to in some professional texts as pedestrian housewife posters, billboards of varying sheets, terminal or station posters, shop window posters, perimeter and transit posters," Inyang (2003, p.247). All these format ground belong to general posters category.

A poster is a two-dimensional flat surface, which carries text (typography), illustrations (pictures) and other elements of visual characters orderly arranged and displayed for the purpose of visual communication. The contents are mostly written words, images, colours and pattern/forms in positive and negative spaces presented to be read with ease by all and sundry. According to Ibid, p.247, quoting Xavier Bermudez attempt on poster;

"the function of the poster varies according to its objectives; it informs, stimulates, postulates, explains, provokes, motives, convinces, in accordance with the content of the message it transmits and, at the same time, it develops the aesthetic sense of the spectator, contributing to the definition of a visual-cultural awareness among its public."

The foregoing premise is apt in the sense that it captures the core essence of a poster layout for purposes of the 'poster client' and the 'anticipated audience', by which the assumed and supposed responsive motivation is already covered in the poster postulation. Howbeit a poster message may connect

to the supposed responder; it is expedient that such visual communication is graphical and substantially concise, precise, and simple, legible and readable. The art aesthetics should be one that shows visual simplicity and meets communication model with minimal visual rhetoric. By all design standards, posters designed for the purposes of reaching a mass audience is a courteous activity and demand high sense of understanding the dynamics of design planning, orientation and precision. Poster designing is a deliberate action that is built on emphasis (E), attract attention (AA) and communicates (C) with no ambiguity.

Many Christian religious posters have been caught up in a web of 'poster sermon' without consenting to the readers' entry point and exist, and eyes rest. The reason is not far-fetched; "Do it yourself" (DIY) software is unavoidably in the open markets that there is no conscious resort to design knowledge and orientation situated in the domains of universal design practice. Another reason is "the emergence of 'road side digital template assisted graphic designers'" (Ibid, p.252). It is nonetheless underlined that principles and law of formal organization guides processes in graphic design genre. And so as the posterist, Pentecostalism appears to have over-run poster contents that the 'poster client' is gullible to accept anything juggled into poster page as design graphics. Yet, the case becomes even worst that these posters ventilate the totality of a sermon from start to finish without recourse to the sensibility of the target audience and privileged readers.

The obvious remains that many churches by their names have become even more confuse that anything and everything from photographs to text information (body copy) presented on poster layout reaches the target audience with no ambiguity. Apparently, product advertising seems not different to what churches do with poster displays. One assertion to it is that "the image economy of Pentecostal advertising has played a significant role in the construction of niches of appeal for churches and their leaders," Asonzeh, 2008, p.125. It is against this singular view that poster is a medium of mass communication targeted at diverse viewers and as such, query the eloquence of the poster message to inform or explain to the mobile audience if most instead of specifics information are captured in a poster advert. Ever since, graphic design rendering demands that layout and content message should be apt, legible and comprehensible.

2. Christian Religious Advert Posters

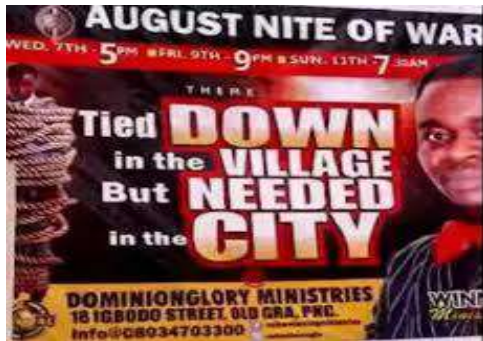


Figure 1: Church Advert Poster. Graphic Designer Unknown. Author's Collection



Figure 2: Church Advert Poster. Graphic Designer Unknown. Author's Collection



Figure 3: Church Advert Poster. Graphic Designer Unknown. Author's Collection



Figure 4: Church Advert Poster. Graphic Designer : Unknown. Author's Collection



Figure 5: Church Advert Poster. Graphic Designer Unknown. Author's Collection



Figure 6: Church Advert Poster. Graphic Designer : Unknown. Author's Collection

3. The 'Church Client' and Graphic Design

Visual Communication design is largely presented with copy as words and clipart - photographs, which are constant concept irrespective of the perspective of the information block and design approach. Moving from one point to another in Port Harcourt metropolis as one example presents varying church advertisement posters, which the text and photographs therein, has become even more problematic than expected from the viewpoint of graphic design intellect. Crusade posters, Night vigil posters, House fellowship posters, Deliverance

service posters etc., with captions in texts as 'EXPLOSION 2015', 'DELIVERANCE 2016', 'ANINOTING SERVICE', 'CROSSOVER TIME' with lots more other photographs and body copy. The words are presented in thick and thin typefaces, stylized font faces with combinations of connotative and regular letters of the alphabet. Perhaps, this is a metaphor that illustrate to the invitee a state of Pentecostalism and not necessarily the 'ideals of the poster presence; even as some poster designers do not see need to consider the audience visual perception or attention span when designing posters. Sometimes, what is considered about the target audience is the

make belief rewards they stand to get from attending such program. Ironically, the 'church client' commission's the poster design and so dictates the design concept and orientation, since the bills are paid by the 'church client'.

Albeit, the 'client dictates' scenario seems to have caught up with the two groups of poster designers identified here; 'academic/trained graphic designer' and 'commercial designers that handle design software. Here, academic refers to the study of graphic art and design in formal institution of learning while 'commercial designers' includes; street sign-writers, roadside artists, computer operators/typists and self-taught designers. The latter category has little or no formal training but can command graphic software. Apparently, some of them, 'commercial designers' undergo apprenticeship training. Comparatively, Ogbu, (2007, p.72) noted the differences between the academic artist and the informally trained designers, he concludes that the differences are always clear. Scholars of design knowledge would agree to the fact that poster is a creative work of art and the 'posterist' as defined in Inyang (2003 p.254) is "responsible for the arrangement of the content and form of the poster." He affirms the position that posters "as piece of creative work, its success or failure is dependent on the whim of the 'fine artist', whose primal concern may be at variance with the visual sensibility of its audience."

Sadly enough, this is the case with some designers of visual communication designs. One reason to the debate is the fact that digital computer guarantees the freedom of typeface selection, layout composition, as well as the printing of the creative deposit. Again, the poster designer's intention for the church is viewed in two scenarios; (1) to present a photo gallery of church leaders and friends with array of texts (body copy) just to impress the 'church client, and (2) to present the 'client dictate' as a way of exhibiting graphic design prowess and financial income. Perhaps, this leaves one to reason that the Nigeria design landscape appears to be largely unstructured and not regulated as argued in some quarters.

The situation has permeated a free for all poster design approach, which is neither here nor there, yet commissioned by one Pentecostal Denomination and

posted in every available open space. The same psyches have caught up with a few 'professionals' even within the corridors of the professional bodies and practice. These sets of designers engage in designing posters by reasons of trend, not necessarily from the perspective of design principles and graphic design orderliness. This category of graphic artist/designers seems to be caught up in what is trendy in Christian religious posters, whether these posters are poorly designed or not. Nonetheless, the submission noted in (Inyang, 2003, p.257) states the obvious; the situation becomes even worrisome since professional standards have been abandoned by reason of availability of 'Teach Yourself' (TY) software. This situation re-echo's Andrew (2006, p.9) position that "today style has been reduced to a choice, not a matter of conviction but one of convenience."

Some graphic designers of the two groups of 'posterist' aforementioned have taken advantage of the digital landscape to display texts and photographs than design proficiency, knowledge and technical know-how. On the face of it, knowledge is unquantifiable; it is inevitable, guided and precise where applied in principle.

This paper sums up to say that the psyche of the poster designer should rejuvenate in the philosophy of text and photo efficacy in achieving communication goals, especially posters because some people read posters while on transit. Text and photo efficacy is an encompassing visual language encapsulated in Philip Pecorino (2000). He held that "proper and ideal are psychology meant to guide action or to prescribe a way of life." The logic contained is that the word "proper" and "ideal" are used relatively to describe text communication, photo placement and design layouts, and as phenomena that elucidate essence of letters of alphabet side by side photographs employed in ephemeral as the Christian religious posters. Considering that poster is a universal medium of visual communication, which serves among all to educate, hence, Pecorino's idea of concept of knowledge is dynamic, depends on the quality or level of acquisitions too. In the case of graphic design planning, education is a prerequisite to knowledge and how the principles and laws of formal organization are employed in mass medium formats such as Christian advertisement posters.

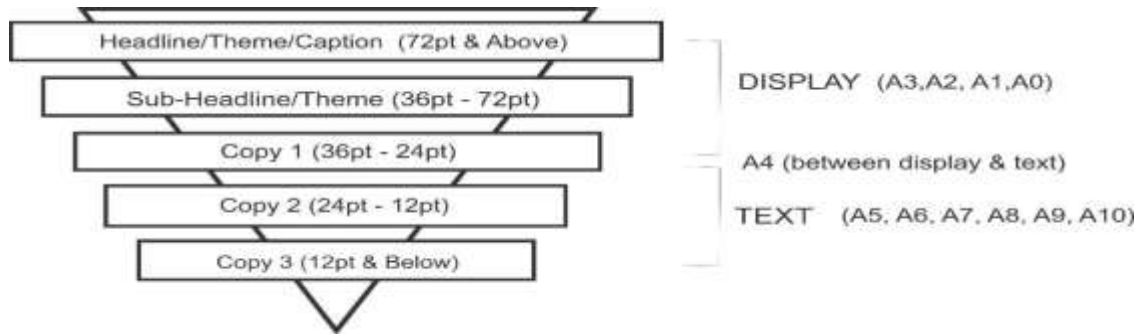


Figure 7: Display structure and model. Text context in order of message importance. Reverse pyramid of Maslow’s hierarchy theory.

Typeface point is dependent on format/layout size.

4. Visual Communication Design Education

Helmstadter (1970, p.2) in Robergs (2010) identified six common methods of acquiring knowledge but indicates ‘Tenacity, Intuition and Authority’ as generally accepted forms. He defines thus; “tenacity is accepted because the idea has been accepted for so long; intuition is acceptance based on no process of interpretation of assessment and authority is accepted due to the high standing of the source.” In the same view, Carole & Julian (2004, p.2), see learning as a constituent of the concept of constructivism, which is based on three key principles as; learning is constructed as a response to each individual’s experiences and prior knowledge; learning occurs through active exploration; and learning occurs within a social context – interaction between learners.” The above submissions infer that knowledge acquisition is not reduced to academic exercise alone but a system and process of following standards that are proven over time.

The fact is no less obvious if going by what Noble & Russell (2005, p.29) stated as regard issues of constructing meanings in verbal and visual language, communicating to audience, graphic design practice and the institutions of higher learning. Irvwier (2009, p.332) opines “the primary objective of design education is to form the basis of independent thought, to develop recognition, sensitivity and social responsibility in the implementation of the design processes to real human needs.” Apparently, knowledge acquisition is in two folds, either (as with practical skill or expertise) and (as with theoretical understanding of the subject). In same view, the ‘not well designed Christian posters’ or ‘self-taught graphic designers’ are obsessively caught up in the dilemma of the laws of formal organization. This throws up the need to re-emphasis the view held in Inyang (2003, p.257) that “calls for an apparent need to examine the thorny issues of certification in a

discipline that accommodates varying entry levels” and the fanaticism of some poster designers, the ‘church clients’ and ‘client dictate’ scenario.

Therefore, it is not in every ways that texts and images are put together in poster layout that it is posted as Christian advertisement poster; not every posterist understands the technical know-how of designing and or dynamism of graphics for visual communication. The position howbeit, propels an empirical discourse that should help to open up analysis in graphic design compositions and endeavour vis-à-vis visual communication design. Again, there is a need to look at the place of the informal designer, what Inyang, (2003) called ‘computer business bureau’ in the productions of graphics for visual communication purposes, even though they complement roles in graphic design business.

5. The ‘Posterist’ and Design Orientation

As much as poster information is out there, not much of thought is given to layouts composition and organization of the poster messages. There is no gain saying that the church as the ‘poster client’ is not worry to note if the poster designer (graphic designers) have a duty to rightly advice them on what is needed in a typical poster presentation. A designer of poster messages should be someone that understands the nitty-gritty of visual communication design, especially given the rationale that some target audiences are mobile. Again, an average poster message should reach the reader within the first five minutes of viewing the poster. According to Odling-Smee, (2013, p.7), “poster is a tool used to get people quickly interested in your research, to communicate a gist of your ideas and to invite responses”, which “is perhaps the most important aspect of poster design,” (p.26). Poster design is the end product of a plan action on a two-dimensional format, which belongs

to the field of visual communication design - graphic design endeavour.

Akpan quoted in Ogbu, (2007, p. 36) is of the view that “both professional and the roadside artist become known in poster design but qualities differ in terms of communication of ideas in various forms of using few words.” The information in posters is meant to persuade, orientate and inform the audience to behaviour or think in a particular way. Different kinds of poster layouts and designs are particularly based on the kind of information that is aimed to reach a certain audience. The size and shape of substrate used in the poster layouts can help determine message analysis and configuration. Apparently, the designer should be aware of all rudimentary rules that govern ‘text and photo ratio’ and the positioning of substrates in poster designs. However required the type of poster campaign, it is basic that the content composition or layout design is done using elements of design (line, colour, shapes, pattern/texture); “element of graphic (text, pictogram, hues and positive and negative space) within protocol of graphic design procedures, and principle as “balance, emphasis, rhythm, proportion and unity,” Richard (1995, p.38). The above mentioned elements and principle are utilized in the most meaningful ways to making the layout ‘visually audible’. Consequently, the visual content of a poster layout is as important as the information it carries in weight.

Design is a context that appeals to the eyes but a good design content is the successful employment of components of graphics and design principles, which make sense or meaning whether in 2 or 3 dimensional

format. Achieving design content is not arbitral but a careful exercise dependent on the designer know-how skills. (Map Design: Graphic Design Basic, p.11) noted thus;

the designer has to know exactly whom he wants to address and what he wants to impart, respond to the receiver, his perception and his surroundings, combine his design possibilities for suitable tools and use adequate methods, languages and codes.

Therefore, any person engaging in designing graphics composition should be pinned to solving problems for both the ‘church client’ and the target public. A message is designed to communicate through the effective ordering and representing of the common visual items identifiable around and among the shared ideas of socialization. Whether as a concept or a presentation there exist difference in what defines ideal of designs for poster messages.

However, it is a standard that “a balance must be achieved between legibility and clear connection between visual and verbal,” Odling-Smee (2013, p.26) remarks. Again, the shape or positioning of layout substrates should be considered as well. Richard, (1995 p.38) noted that “size and shape are sometime determined by the method that will be used for distribution” of the photograph ratio and texts selection for the poster layout. Layout can be positioned in either portrait form - vertical or landscape form - horizontal format with clear understanding of placement coding; ‘H’1, ‘H’6’, where ‘H’ meaning hierarchy and ‘1’ meaning biggest text size and ‘6’ smallest size as the case may be.

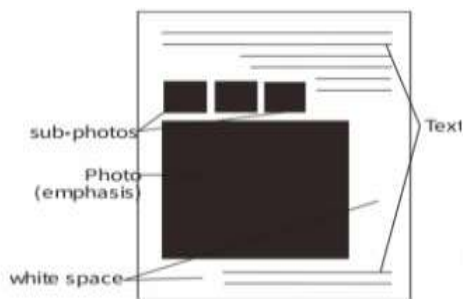


Figure 8. Portrait position. Author’s Collection.

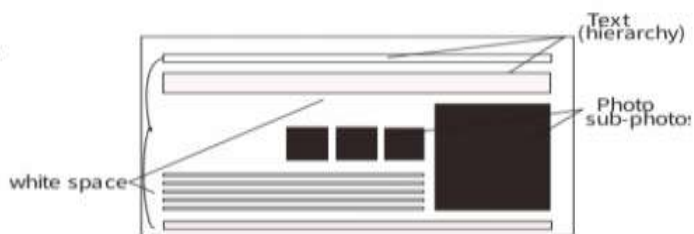


Figure 9. Landscape position. Author’s Collection.

Hess, Tosney and Liegel (2006) opine differences between good and bad posters and certain qualities that should reflect thereof;

5.2 Qualities of a good poster layout

- (i) Clear, concise, informative - text should be visible that each character can be identified while pictograms is visible

enough that images can be decipher. Information shown in layout should be direct to the message content without unnecessary distractions.

- (ii) Strong use of visuals and headers for key points – where necessary, visuals as photograph should concentrate on a connotative theme while other photos, where need be should have a lesser emphases.
- (iii) Context -summary, key points of interest, future possibilities- content should show in brief a summary of the desired information covering positive and the negative space for eye rest.

5.3 Qualities of a bad poster layout

- No clear structure or context- when elements are not structured in order of consistence.
- Layout becomes disorganized and without form. Choice of arrangement should be in order of sizes ‘using the H1, H2 coding. H1 meaning that the most important heading.
- Small graphics and text, lack of design consistency- when element used is not commensurable with areas of positive space (used up space).
- Exclusion of key information- when poster message is not highlighted in poster content. The loss of relative key emphasis or key information puts the poster as just copy right manual.
- Text Overload- when content becomes worked up and there is no breathing space.
- No hierarchy of information- when element show no distinctive difference in sizes. Poster content is filled with unnecessary information or lack of clear hierarchy.
- A book rather than poster- posters are not read the same way a book is read. Therefore poster information should be simple with less pictorial and typography.

6. The “Principle of the New Typography” in Graphic Design Practice”

It is interestingly creative to combine texts – font types (serif and or san serif) and photographs in posters to attract attention to the poster. These have become the norm that adds some sort of branding in posters especially for Christian religious purposes. Thus, for font selection, typeface anatomy (physical structure) should be considered. It should be appropriate in style and sizes that conforms to professional convention of text use in the poster planning. The typeface should be rightly selected and legible, without delusion and photographs should relatively define meaning to poster message line and be simple. Here, convention is not just a practice but

what is justified in practice of a profession. It is important that the designer of visuals communication posters understand these typographic principles, rules, characteristics and the features of different font families.

The font families come in different shapes, forms, and sizes. Some come in slant, curves, and upright and so on; as uppercases and lowercases. New Time Roman, Futura, Baskerville, Didot etc., are typefaces of different structural mannerism. Fonts are measured in points (pts.); 8pts, 12pts, 16pts, 24pts, 36pts etc. 12pt typefaces and below are considered as ‘text’ while above 72pt are called ‘display typefaces. Some are designed to express moods, actions; some have delicate looks; some are condensed and tough in structure; others are ornamented, decorative and even customized. Sandra, (1977, p. 46) “divided typefaces classification into six categories; The first three are faces for special moods and uses, while the last three contain the basic everyday text and display faces – Black letters, Scripts and Cursives, Ornamentals: Romans, San Serifs and Contemporary serifs. Every typeface has purposeful uses but not all of them are necessarily used in graphic design communication. Like a speaker, texts are the voice with which graphic design commentary and documentary reaches large audience. Literally put, the tone of typographic (use of text) expression depends on the designers understanding of the dynamics of typefaces. The text in posters acts as the high and low-pitches, that is, legibility means being audible. It is therefore in the place of the graphic designer to show that he/she understands the dynamism and functional appeal of selected fonts used alongside photographs in graphic designs chores. The position agrees with the concept as advanced by Jan Tschichold, a German posterist of the Jugendstil’ art movement

The concept “Principle of the New Typography” by Jan Tschichold is a psychological notion that evoked new ideology and analogy of the use of san serif typefaces. The proposed idea gave “radically new direction for German typography and advertising art” and on which the concept of the ‘Jugendstil’ art movement employed direction to the style of “simplicity” using contrast of white and black. This advocated for “elemental forms and clarity of communication that avant-garde artists in Germany had called for earlier” (Victor, 1996, p.1), as against the old style of typography, which “beauty” and not functionality was most paramount. The theory concerns using “visual perceptual information” to the advantage of man’s existence, reaction to not just societal factors but also nature. Jan Tschichold, (p.4) remarked “both nature and technology teaches that

“form” is independent and grows out of function (purpose), out of the materials used (organic and technical) and out of how they are used.”

The strategic importance of graphic design as a vehicle of easy and visual communication is one that calls for optimal attention noted beyond visual aesthetics alone. Jan Tschichold theory values functionality of typography in addition to design aesthetics through creative innovation and rules. Function plays a pivotal role in communication beyond bias of style, form or posture. New typographic principle has been used to give clarity to information in both manufacturing and service industries as witnessed during German’s Jugendstil period and in the philosophy of the Bauhaus designs.

Observations have shown that some people being mobile at the same time want to catch a glimpse of poster messages. The position is that to efficiently read posters requires the eyes being at rest with the texts, texts distribution ratio photographs, as well as making learned and automatic movements of the eye (saccade eye movement, Emile Javal theory of eye movement) and the head. The peculiarity of this principle affords the reader the flexibility to

recognize words (text - serif typefaces or the sans serifs) and how they adapt to colours and the surrounding graphic elements to communicate. It also opens the graphic artist/designer to how typefaces fit into space (linear/atmospheric and angular perspective), sizes (hierarchical order and optical illusion), posture and distance. It is with this view that Gibson, (1966) associates the atmospheric influence of the environment on text information and colour appearance and “suggested them as relationship between perception, intuition and action.”

The notion puts acquired knowledge into action by solving certain challenges to practically proofing what is possible. In the light of the foregoing, the theory examines and estimate the graphic designer; the understanding of designs by measure of principle that governs use of typography in design and photographic placement in visual communication design. Also, it tests the ability to apply same in practice, as opined by Wilson, Fred, and Bruce (1981). An example is the case of the “Road Signages,” Jan Tschichold identifies it as “perceptual activities,” that is, recognizable text or use of less ambiguous readable typeface side by side pictogram.



Figure 9. A. San serif typeface, B. serif typeface, C. stylized typeface, D. san serif in vertical position. Author’s Collection.

Arguably, Tschichold typographic theory can be said to have contributed to text communication given its evidence in the ideology of the Bauhaus dominant typefaces- sans serif. More so, it helps influence designers’ decision making during the design process and improve typographic composition with or without photos. It confines to a rapid identification of standardized graphic signs located on flat surface as a poster. For instance, using the analogy where the driver of a moving Van could not decipher directional signs from a distance because the graphic designer could not decide on what proper typeface to use or how best to position typefaces. As though, certain text strokes can distort information. This is a problem to both the designer and also to the target audience. The notion or principle also identifies other factors that demonstrate use of typographic composition for clarity, visibility and legibility in text

communication. Consequently, the above analogy underscores the relevance of using acquired knowledge to solve nonverbal and visual communication problem. It clearly posits the difference between the trained (professional) and the untrained (nonprofessional) designer. Apparently, the difference is clear.

7. Conclusion

Advertising and Pentecostalism are somewhat identical, an inseparably plural within the scope of this paper. In relationship to religious Pentecostalism, Jhally, in Iulia Grad, (2004, p.143) asserts “20th century advertisement is the most powerful and sustained system of propaganda in human history,” as seem and suggested in some Christian religious posters. No offence to Pentecostal leaders, however

the idea to cluster supposed ‘church sermon’ on the poster page becomes rather controversial, suggests commercial intention of information therein. Hitherto, a typical religious poster design is one that demands precision and not one that attempts to sell – persuade than inform, invite and more or less educate the target audience to participate in the activities of a church. The premise of this perspective is that the public is left with a connotative conjuncture, and reluctantly interpret the poster page/messages as photos gallery often presented as part of a communiqué. However big the poster size, it still does suggest that the gist of interest in poster information should be few. It does not foreclose the fact that church poster is an advertisement for a church program. So, it is an interest of note that church Pentecostalism, poster pages and the poster designer (graphics) prowess are targeted to offering by all means clear design messages, one that carries tailor-cut salvation, which according to church gospel is the essence of the Christian faith propagation.

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