

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF SHARED VISUAL ARGUMENTS AND PROPAGANDA
TECHNIQUES OF RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA POSTERS
AND RUSSIAN INTERNET MEMES

By

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Abstract

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Rhetoric, the study of argument using logic, has been studied for centuries. However, there is some disagreement among scholars on whether or not argumentation can be applied to visual imagery. Images are noted to have more emotional appeal than text does.

Visual propaganda was mass produced in the form of propaganda posters, most popularly in the early 20th century. In more recent times, the sharing of images has moved to social media, popularly through memes. This paper analyzes two Soviet propaganda posters produced by one Soviet publishing house, Litizdat, and two memes created by the Russian organization the Internet Research Agency to observe techniques and arguments used by Russian creators of propaganda in these two different kinds of medium.

These four figures were given a case study analysis individually and then examined with each other noting six criteria involving aesthetics or content, emotional appeals, and possible

visual arguments. Findings revealed there are shared techniques in all of the figures, some among the memes, and some among only the posters. Further study is suggested to further examine the persuasive quality of memes, as visual argumentation is demonstrated to be viable and the potential for it to be continually used for nefarious reason is clear.

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Chapter 1

Description of Thesis

While the study of rhetoric, or persuasive language, can be traced back to ancient times, looking at the influential power of rhetorical images is significantly newer. Rhetoric is the study of argument using logic. Foss (1982) defines it as almost a form of literacy to read the world around us. However, images have a more emotional appeal and impact than text does. A persuasive image can transcend language barriers and provoke emotions as their messaging can be conveyed through design. In the 20th century, visual propaganda imagery became closely associated with political discourse.

In the time leading up to and closely following the world wars, the most advantageous way of sharing visual propaganda was in propaganda posters often used to further a political party's ideology. In more modern times, the fastest way to widely share these kinds of images has moved to social media, most popularly through memes. Social media has perhaps become the most common form of communication in our modern society, overtaking television and print. The rise in the emphasis in visual communication in the form of videos and photos is apparent as even large corporations and brands rely on them for the purposes of marketing and brand management. With such a focus, however, it is possible for internet memes to be more than just harmless fun but causing more harm than we realize.

It is worthwhile to analyze persuasive techniques in visual communication to better present ways to reject propaganda messaging and better identify when we're looking at propaganda rather than fall victim to its messaging, particularly if polarizing or creating divisions. The call for ethics in persuasive messaging that arose after the popularity of wartime

posters has not matched the same call in social media usage, although the recent congressional appearances of Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Google CEO Sundar Pichai is the beginning of a call for that direction.

This thesis analyzed both Russian propaganda posters and Russian memes—an important study so we can observe similar trends, identify similar tactics used by Russian creators of propaganda, and better identify persuasive and visual techniques used with both mediums. The main goal was to analyze how visual political imagery may or may not have changed under the new media era, which in turn is a good setup to measure its use as a vital propaganda tool in further research. Careful consideration was made for comparisons between Russian posters and Russian memes both thematically and stylistically. This thesis examined a complete analysis on meanings and a literature review of works on propaganda with discussion on specific themes and styles. Persuasion tactics used by memes help identify how we are vulnerable to mass manipulation in the age of new media.

Chapter 2

Literature review

PERSUASION

Rhetoric is the art of effective persuasive discourse. It is one of three ancient arts of language along with grammar and logic but is not deemed a science (Corbett, 1971), meaning that it is a bit more holistic and subjective depending on the subject matter and intentions of the rhetorician, rather than something more objective like grammar and logic. There is evidence of rhetoric in Greek literature, particularly in Hellenistic society centuries before the first handbook would be written (Corbett, 1971). Gorgias was the first sophist (Greek philosopher/teacher) to recognize the persuasiveness of emotional appeals (Corbett, 1971). Isocrates focused on ethical use of persuasiveness and was just as influential as Aristotle when it came to studies in rhetoric, with much of his works being lost to antiquity (Corbett, 1971). Plato, who was against the sophists, had negative opinions about rhetoric as he saw it as defective and with suspicion. In his work *Republic*, where he spoke of an ideal state, he expressed concerns about how rhetoric was used daily and said rhetoric and poetry should be banned from his utopian state (Connors, Ede, & Lunsford, 1984). He said rhetoricians are not like philosophers in that they focus on the opinion of the many as opposed to discoverable truth or reason (Corbett, 1971). In *Gorgias*, Plato defines rhetoric as the persuasion of ignorant masses within the courts and assemblies (Plato, trans. 2008). He thought of persuasion as a low skill (Corbett, 1971). Plato believed that your logic should be enough to convince someone in an argument and that rhetoric was not needed.

In contrast, Aristotle, a student of Plato, presented rhetoric as a persuasive *art* with a focus on arguments (Corbett, 1971). He believed rhetoric was less about logic and more about presentation and superficialities that could lead in an argument over reason. According to

Aristotle, the true basis of rhetoric was on probability because someone has to base their arguments on an opinion and get others to believe those opinions rather than established truths (Corbett, 1971). According to sophists, the function of rhetoric is to persuade, whereas for Aristotle it was to convince (Corbett, 1971). Rhetoricians believe humans are unique in that they are rational compared to animals, and that rhetoric is “an offshoot of logic” (Corbett, 1971, p. 50). In his work *Rhetoric*, Aristotle says that “rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectics” (Aristotle, trans. 1926, p. xxxi). Dialectics, a rhetorical form, is essentially a conversation by two persons wishing to establish truth through sound argument, a debate, built on logic. His definition of rhetoric as “the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject” heavily emphasizes the logical aspect of this process (Aristotle, trans. 1926, p. 15). Plato was essentially idealistic in his inductive reasoning, while Aristotle was more of a realist in his deductive reasoning. Aristotle invented deductive reasoning (moving from a general idea to a specific one) and is sometimes referred to the Father of Logic (Zahra & Shehzad, 2017). He is credited with producing the earliest works on logic although continued work on logic has led to different development over the centuries (Zahra & Shehzad, 2017). Syllogisms are units of logic invented by Aristotle to analyze and test deductive reasoning and are the notion that Aristotle’s ideology of logic are based on (Corbett, 1971).

An enthymeme is a type of syllogism, an argumentative statement that contains a conclusion and an implied premise (Corbett, 1971). A syllogism reasons from statements or premises, it is a logical argument with gaps that need to get filled by the audience hearing them (Hill & Helmers, 2004). A syllogism is deducting a premise from a conclusion, such as the statement, “She must be a Republican if she favors small government.” Aristotle wrote, “The enthymeme must consist of few propositions, fewer often than those which make up normal

sylogism” (Aristotle, trans. 1929, p. 1). Thus, the difference is a syllogism leads to a conclusion from universally-known premises, but an enthymeme leads to a tentative conclusion from plausible premises (Corbett, 1971). Syllogism is the deductive mode of arguing in logic, whereas the equivalent would be enthymeme in rhetoric (Corbett, 1971). Similar to Aristotle, Wiley (1956) conducted work on the type of logic when persuasion is the means to an end sought. Upon analysis of what is needed for persuasion to prevail, he reasons that persuasion is at its best when the subject matter is objective. In other words, with the message having less room for interpretation, the message is less likely to be interpreted subjectively and thus be more effective.

Aristotle said that there are three means to persuade others: logos (the appeal to reason), pathos (the appeal to emotions), and ethos (the appeal to ethics) (Corbett, 1971). His argument was that we could use any (or all three) depending on various factors such as the subject, to different circumstances at play, to who the audience was (Corbett, 1971). These centuries-old references to different kinds of rhetoric can be applied to propaganda messaging used in both the time of the great wars and today. Rhetoric has lived on beyond ancient texts and is used in our day-to-day, whether we consume advertising or try to influence others to do what we ask. Advertising design is considered effective if it influences people to buy products; signs on highways are intended to control the flow of traffic; currency is designed to prevent forgery; and political propaganda is created to affect people’s beliefs and actions (Bennett, 2006).

PROPAGANDA

Attempts at defining propaganda can sometimes be as varied as propaganda communication itself. Stokoe (2010) defines it as a mode of communication aimed at influencing the attitude of a community toward a cause or position. Kenez (1985), in contrast, insists that

propaganda can be both covert and overt, sometimes intended to influence our emotions, at other times our minds. In Hill and Helmers (2004), Hill furthers this definition and focus on emotions as he examines visual psychology, making note about how images prompt emotional reactions. Emotions have the capability of overriding rationality, further emphasizing Aristotle's pathos as significant to persuasion (Hill & Helmers, 2004). Persuasiveness works best when there is an absence of rationality which is easily achieved with pathos.

Argumentation is the collective effort someone takes to convince someone to accept a standpoint (Van Eemeren, Grootendorst, & Eemeren, 2004). Whether Aristotle's enthymeme (an argument with a missing premise that is essential for its reasoning) could come in a visual format was up for debate for a long while. With its basis in antiquity where oral arguments were common, enthymemes were largely viewed as based on verbal language (Hill & Helmers, 2004). However, since Aristotle's contributions, there has been some division in schools of thought on whether or not visual communication can be classified as argumentation. Our eventual move toward visual mediums such as broadsides, posters and ultimately television and the internet are good reason to say that argumentation can continue in a visual format. Kjeldsen's (2015) work claims that some method of argumentation is even best suited to be presented visually. Visual propaganda is therefore an example of visual argumentation.

While the word propaganda usually has a negative connotation, it is about shaping perceptions that are not necessarily negative. In other words, propaganda can be manipulative but is at its essence used mostly as a means to convey. These are valid points as even advertising can fall under the same definition. It is up to the intentions of the creator what the end goal is for the intended "consumer." Traffic PSAs that remind someone to buckle up or not drink or drive for the purpose of public safety is a form of propaganda, for example. Overall, propaganda is a

deliberate, carefully planned attempt to convey an ideology to an audience with a related objective by its creator (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019). The objective is usually to strengthen or adjust attitudes or behaviors in an audience (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019).

When examining the history of politics and propaganda, it is worth looking at the significance of World War I. As Jowett and O'Donnell (2019) put it, World War I was the first time in recent history that people had to come together for a global struggle. Mass media was used to propagandize the populations to feel patriotism, fear/hate an enemy, and commit to the war effort (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019). In the United States, George Creel directed the Committee on Public Information to “sell the war to America” by creating propaganda materials (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019, p. 166). Use of propaganda during wartime was done by various nations and organizations, sometimes using factual information, or even resorting to lies and false stories.

Jowett and O'Donnell (2019) write about the difference in white, black, and gray propaganda, different forms that relate to the message's openness. White propaganda comes from a source that identifies themselves honestly and presents information that tends to be accurate. It goes for credibility with the audience; examples include using national celebrations or patriotism to skew public perception. Black propaganda is where a source is either concealed or credited to someone else and presents lies or exaggerated deceptions. Joseph Goebbels, Adolf Hitler's propaganda minister, made the claim that bigger lies “evoked more belief than milder statements” (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019, p. 18). An example would be the way Jews were portrayed in German and Russian propaganda to demonize them and incite anti-Semitism and justified violence toward them (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019). Gray propaganda is a combination of the two; a source could be known but the information is still false, for example. It could be used

to embarrass an enemy much like how Radio Moscow used the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and President John F. Kennedy negatively toward the United States (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019).

The Russian Bolsheviks (leaders of the Red Army) were good at propaganda because they were good at politics (Kenez, 1985). A good politician needs to know the greatest needs of their constituents and needs to gain support both to be elected and have their policies pass. A good example of this is when the Bolsheviks tried to facilitate access to education but solely for political reasons (Kenez, 1985). The Red Army was astute because they knew they had to get public support, having worked in the underground before the revolutions started. The Bolsheviks would eventually go on to found the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, with victories in the Russian Revolutions of 1917, and the Russian Civil War that immediately followed until 1922. They are noted as heavy users of propaganda in order to sway the populace to their favor, and not necessarily in a militant way.

The Bolsheviks are worthy of study when one wants to look closer at propaganda because the Bolshevik regime was the first to set propaganda and political education goals to help “create a new humanity for living in a new society” (Kenez, 1985, p. 4). In other words, communism needed propaganda in order to work. Kenez (1985) contends that the Bolsheviks specifically succeeded during the Russian Civil War because the Red Army was better than their opponents at getting their message across to the people and ultimately indoctrinating them. Apart from their understanding of politics that came with their underground status, their Marxist ideologies also led them to appeal to the poor and marginalized (Kenez, 1985). The Red Army considered themselves leaders of the working class, many of whom were badly educated and felt underrepresented.

Visual propaganda would take a different turn after the events of the Russian Civil War. Propaganda in the form of political posters was part of the Bolshevik First Five Year Plan at the end of the Russian Civil War (Bonnell, 1999). The plan outlined the many ways the Soviet Union would move from an agrarian state to one based on industry. Posters were selected as the best way to unite the new Russia under Bolshevik messages. Poster production was under the Art Department of the State Publishing House (Izogiz), centralizing control and regulating content (Bonnell, 1999). Visual propaganda was about to be mass produced and heavily controlled.

PROPAGANDA POSTERS

As stated earlier, World War I was when the use of propaganda for political purposes was first widely seen. Propaganda posters were first used in a large scale, although they were used some in the 19th century and as far back as the French Revolution (Bonnell, 1999). If you look at posters from these eras, French posters used lines of large text, but World War I posters used powerful visuals depicting images or symbols of war and famine to drive their points faster (Seidman, 2008). Wartime propaganda posters rose to fame in World War I because they were used to mobilize the public in support of the war effort, and most people were not consciously aware that visual propaganda had existed prior, allowing for them to unknowingly be consumers of it (Fenton, 2014). After World War II the use of posters would eventually become scarcer, perhaps due to the rise in television and radio usage and availability (Seidman, 2008). There were also various institutions that became aware of wartime posters' intentions and started to question the ethics of their use.

Propaganda poster images ranged in size and were often displayed in public spaces which was the best way to reach a large portion of the populace at the time before television or radio.

Within posters, leaders were depicted of considerable size to emphasize their power and importance (Bonnell, 1999). An example is how Joseph Stalin (leader of the Soviet Union after the Russian Civil War) was depicted subordinate to Vladimir Lenin (Bolshevik leader from the revolutions and throughout the Civil War), but then given equal status as his respective role grew in importance (Bonnell, 1999). Leaders' prominent depiction in posters also kept the focus on their personality or appearance of having power more than on what issues they were handling, a tactic that would work better visually instead of with just text. The size of Soviet enemies, in contrast, were distorted to appear small (Bonnell, 1999). They also often appear demonized or monstrous to convey fear and unfamiliarity. Eventually the focus on Stalin would even overtake the focus of the working class in posters as outlined in the First Five Year Plan (Bonnell, 1999). Depictions of power and good vs. evil would be more prominent. As Seidman (2008, p.18) theorized, posters showed either "heroes" or "demons" but not real people as they were.

Common traits of the rise of propaganda posters were how they generally arose in countries where advertising was stricter and literacy rates were low (Seidman, 2008). In 1917, approximately 63 percent of the Russian population was illiterate, with available data revealing that half of the majority rural population, and 20 percent of the urban population, lacked basic literacy skills (Bonnell, 1999). Written propaganda would have posed a problem if the designated consumers of a message were unable to understand it, therefore relaying visual messages was preferred. It was visual literacy that would allow someone with low written literacy to "read" a narrative presented in a poster. Early 20th century propaganda used by Lenin and the Bolsheviks were an "attempt to gain control over the sphere of public discourse and transform popular attitudes and beliefs by introducing new symbols, rituals, and visual imagery" (Bonnell, 1999, p. 1).

The Soviets also had strong visual traditions which made visual propaganda a good fit for their agenda (Bonnell, 1999). Iconography, the use of images or symbols to portray a concept, is part of Russian Orthodoxy in the form of the canonization of saints. It was normal for Russians to have images of saints on display in their homes. Lenin's body was put on display upon his death, for church dogma stated that the bodies of saints did not decay after death (Bonnell, 1999). Their religion was highly visual. Therefore, propaganda posters were deliberately chosen to influence a culture that was used to relaying information through images.

Propaganda images were mass-produced by the assistance of new methods of lithography in the 18th and 19th centuries (Seidman, 2008). The creation of the offset printing process made the production of poster images faster and inexpensive (Seidman, 2008). There was also a shortage of paper after the Russian Revolutions and Russian Civil War which affected the printing of newspapers. Displaying political posters in a public place was a more effective use of scarce paper and ink rather than focusing resources on newspaper distribution (Bonnell, 1999). Such a scenario maxes the impact of intended messages. With the control of communication channels, the Bolsheviks could detach the audience from other contrary messages so they only view sponsored propaganda pieces.

Graphic designers are tasked with "the behavioral concern [that] has to do with the way graphic communications affect the attitudes and behavior of their audiences" (Bennett, 2006, p. 28). There are many designers during these wartimes that were on the payroll of political parties, such as the German designer Hans Schweitzer and other Nazi propagandists who created art for Adolph Hitler's advisers (Stokoe, 2010). As Bennett (2006, p. 28) writes, graphic design is more than just an art form, it is "concerned with the...social impact it effects-- in other words, its social responsibility." Any designer, therefore, has to remind themselves that the images they create

can affect people who view them. Behavioral research is a major component of the ethics designers adhere to.

Designers also considered the psychology of color schemes, which evoked different things in different countries. Like any good designer, they first analyzed their target audience and what specific design elements would be most influential to them. Seidman (2008) shared a study of college students where they described their mindset after viewing certain color combinations. White and green were associated with positivity, and orange and blue were associated with negativity. A common color in propaganda posters is red, particularly for the socialist elements of flags or worker's shirts in some countries (Stokoe, 2010), whereas the patriotic combination of red, white, and blue is used in American posters. Red in particular is the primary color of the Soviets, so it makes sense that it was widely used to emphasize the party. Designers were deliberate with every aspect of a propaganda poster. They also were versed in the psychology of slogans and typography. Sans-serif fonts were preferred, for example, because viewers could read the lettering easier in passing (Seidman, 2008).

SOVIET PRINTING HOUSES

To review, Soviet propaganda was primarily used to spread information and provide a type of “education” to the populace in regards to mobilization toward one purpose, instrumental for the success of Communism (Bryan, 2010). As Bryan (2010, p. 1) wrote, “a country cannot be run without some basis of popular support.” In “Public Opinion” (1947) a U.S. government official analyzed that while the country of Russia appears to be one that did not allow for the open *expression* of public opinion, that does not mean that public opinion did not actually exist and need to be swayed. Stalin was a dictator, but he still had to acquire support from key leaders

in government and industry to build his stronghold. The Soviet Union under the Bolsheviks needed to enact a little bit of fear in their populace but also make a promise for rewards as a way to entice a following (“Public Opinion,” 1947). They had control over mass communication in the form of art, film, literature, music, posters, and more (Bryan, 2010). Apart from their easy readability as stated previously due to literacy rates, posters were also cheaply made and could easily be changed with any possible political shifts.

After the revolutions, Lenin had to gain support for Communism as not all Russians were involved with the revolt (Bryan, 2010). The posters they created glorified the revolutions, recruited Russians to the Red Army, and disparaged the White Army and foreign supporters (Bryan, 2010).

There were numerous Russian printing houses that were dedicated to producing these images on a grand scale. Just to name a few, Litizdat distributed a total of 7.5 million posters and postcards between 1919-1922; Gosizdat printed 3.2 million copies of 75 separate posters over the course of 1920 alone; and the Moscow Rosta Collective produced more than 2 million poster frames during the Civil War (Bonnell, 1999). After Lenin had passed away, and Russia was established under Stalin’s rule, all poster production was moved under the supervision of the Art Department of the State Publishing House, Izogiz. The resolution for this move came from the Central Committee issued on March 11, 1931 (Bonnell, 1999). This is significant because it meant that poster content could increasingly be controlled and monitored, something that remained intact well into when the Russians became involved in the Second World War in 1941 (Bonnell, 1999).

Posters were absolutely everywhere, as they were seen in homes, public modes of transportation, work locations, and public spaces. Each printing house also had its own style, a

style that would change depending on what was occurring on the national level (Dobrenko, 2009). Izogiz was moving a lot of images away from what was seen in the Civil War and creating a new iconography based on the First Five Year Plan. The blacksmith image that was synonymous for workers was now seen as bourgeois as there was a decision to move a “hero” visual from one individual and into something more abstract, such as a silhouette of one (Bonnell, 1999). The silhouette concept was meant to make the “hero” role more open to anyone, but eventually in the 1930s, posters moved toward celebrating and idealizing specific Russian workers and their accomplishments.

The way the “enemy” was depicted in printing houses changed too. A top hat would be a symbol of bourgeoisie status until 1933, when Stalin asked for someone of affluent status to have a “brutal physiognomy, enormous teeth, a thick neck, a sawn-off rifle in his hands” (Bonnell, 1999, p. 216). Such a move was intended to elicit emotion from a viewer, and artists became dedicated to facial expressions and poses with emotional reaction as the goal. Enemies could be external but also internal, as posters encouraged anyone to turn in others who were against the state, including families and loved ones. With enemies depicted differently in different situations, Russian historian Donald Raleigh termed the Bolsheviks “two languages” because they almost appeared to contradict themselves in their depictions depending on how their situation looked (Dobrenko, 2009, p. 690). There was an internal language the Bolsheviks used to gain political traction on those who were not fully on board, such as the Mensheviks, and the external language which made its way onto general, public posters.

The more lubok style depiction of enemies would eventually be abandoned, much to the chagrin of the artists who put forth that effort like Dmitrii Moor, whose style had more of its roots in Russian orthodoxy and portrayed heroes and villains in a binary fashion (Dobrenko,

2009). Moor in particular is noted as a prominent Russian artist during the Bolshevik Era (1917-1921) and the New Economic Policy era (1921-1927) for this binary depiction of evil and heroism (Stokoe, 2010). Moor used color quite purposely in his work with solid colors used for capitalists and red used for Soviet elements. In contrast, artist Viktor Deni took a more satirical approach with exaggerated facial expressions and body size. Artist Aleksandr Apsit, who designed for publishing house VTSIK, designed a more realistic, life-like style, a style that would eventually change as well. With Moor and Deni being Litizdat artists, their artistry would replace that of VTSIK and Apsit (Dobrenko, 2009). This history in style and approach is both lengthy and varied.

MEMES

The word "meme" was first used by biologist Richard Dawkins in 1976 to describe a unit of imitation (or culture) that is transmitted among a population, essentially a metaphor for evolution (Shifman, 2013). The word meme was probably intended to rhyme with gene. The term obviously moved away from biology and grew to mean something more about interaction. Merriam Webster defines meme as "an idea, behavior, style or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture."

Stryker (2011) mentions quite a few examples of memes as shared cultural iconography before the internet became widely used. An example would be the cartoon of a man with a long nose peering over a wall (known as "Kilroy is here") seen drawn in bathroom stalls around the world in the 1980s. There was no internet when this cartoon figure started to be shared, but still the idea of visually sharing a viral symbol was there.

Now, a meme specifically describes content shared among people on the internet, similar to the spread of an idea (Shifman, 2013). Internet memes are photos with captions that can cover many topics from anything funny to more political or social material. Stryker (2011) describes internet memes as a visual way to communicate emotions—something that sounds familiar with propaganda posters from the past and Aristotle’s pathos. Memes can be used to propose and spread ideas or new ways of looking at existing ones. To create and share a meme might mean you find it entertaining, but it also might mean you are affiliated to a group. Stryker (2011) also compares internet memes to television shows, in that you need to have cultural awareness to sometimes get what the memes are referencing. Like modern advertising, memes focus more on popular culture than rhetorical discourse in the traditional sense. If you don't "keep up with the times," you might not understand what a meme is referring to. Therefore, memes can both facilitate the sharing of ideas and be cultural illustrations.

Fenton (2014) writes about how the internet has allowed the general populace to share their thoughts or ideas, no longer dependent on traditional media to know what others are thinking or expressing. A large percentage of internet memes are political, and with social media algorithms that put more content in front of you that you side and agree with, repeated internet meme viewing is perhaps leading to the political polarization that is being seen in many communication channels. Partisan messaging is more popular as a whole, as evident in the higher ratings of FOX News and MSNBC over the more neutral PBS, for example. Politically-oriented people are furthering their ideologies with the creation or sharing of memes and are, inadvertently or directly, looking to sway public opinion with politically-oriented memes. Memes are visual, political rhetoric that is user-generated (Huntington, 2016).

With the rise and easy availability of the internet, the state is no longer the sole owner of the power to persuade as in the time of wartime posters. Everyday people now have that capability. Soviet and World War II propaganda posters were shared in public areas during the height of their popularity, but in the age of new media, the internet is now the public sphere. The proliferation of memes has also been made easier through the easy access to digital image-editing software. Internet users who create memes are not dependent on professional graphic designers who used to pay so much attention to the minute style and typography of propaganda posters from the past. Gone are the days of designers and their astute attention to the psychology of their designs and purpose of their message. Anyone can create a meme and do it anonymously. There are countless websites that make memes even easier to create without any knowledge of Photoshop, such as memegenerator.com, imgur.com, and imgflip.com. Anyone with internet access can find a way to create a meme, and anyone with a social media account can share it. The easy creation of memes has taken a life of its own. Fenton (2014) writes about how the internet has allowed the general populace to share their thoughts or ideas, no longer dependent on the state. The anonymity of memes and the internet also allows individuals to not fear repercussions (Fenton, 2014).

One could argue that the power of memes also has to do with how they are shared. Memes are part of the readily available endless scroll the average social media user makes daily on their platform of choice. Even if a person is not political, they can easily be exposed to political messaging and propaganda. Social media has already been credited as a useful tool for political movements ranging from the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street, to Me Too and Black Lives Matter. With the prevalent use of social media, we are perhaps more likely to consume political messaging via social media than we were wartime propaganda posters in the

past because the average person voluntarily consumes social media feeds numerous times a day. It is in the extremely high number of eyes that can casually see political memes that these images have power, and also in the likelihood of viewing the same message more than once. Repeated viewing could even lead one to see something as more of a fact than an opinion, and can easily be black propaganda because it is difficult to find who originally created one and for what purpose.

INTERNET RESEARCH AGENCY

A report released in December 2018, written by cybersecurity firm New Knowledge and commissioned by the Senate Intelligence Committee, revealed that a Russian propaganda group, the Internet Research Agency (IRA) had been creating memes and content on social media accounts with the intention of creating political division in the United States (Thompson & Lapowsky, 2018). The report was backed by a second one written by the Computational Propaganda Project at Oxford University and network analysis company Graphika. New Knowledge reviewed 10.4 million tweets, 1,100 YouTube videos, 116,000 Instagram posts, and 61,500 unique Facebook posts published from 2015-2017 for their findings (Thompson & Lapowsky, 2018).

Alfaro (2018) took a deep look at various fake Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube accounts created and run by the IRA to spread their memes. It is worth noting how these accounts present their information in clear English, so a viewer has no knowledge that the content was created in Russia, and have the general appearance of any other meme-sharing account, with even an apparent innocuous page dedicated to Texas state pride among the list. Followers to these pages might follow because they find these memes appealing or amusing, engage with the page and

also share the content – an act that further spreads the memes’ message and the IRA’s intent further than just the page itself. Anyone can also save the meme and reshare it (a practice that has made it so that even after the 2018 report, these IRA-created memes are still being shared well into 2019). There are a wide array of topics these accounts and memes were dedicated to, from black activism and feminism, to immigration and Hillary and Bill Clinton.

The content created by the IRA was intended to support or dismiss topics popular in both right-wing and left-wing American politics (Thompson & Lapowsky, 2018). The content was also used to dissuade voter turnout in the 2016 presidential election with false information or the promotion of third-party candidates. The IRA also tried to target information of pertinence to black Americans, such as police brutality and voter turnout, through the creation of fake websites and the deliberate creation of accounts and memes to influence their participation in the election. (Thompson & Lapowsky, 2018).

The memes that were shared by the IRA may appear politically charged but harmless to the average eye, however, the U.S. Defense Department and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) have been studying memes for years, recognizing their cultural influence and capability of changing values and behaviors of those who view them (Thompson & Lapowsky, 2018). DARPA was originally formed in 1958 in response to the Soviet launch of Sputnik, the first satellite in space (Barrett & Kent, 2018). Their mission is to prevent “strategic surprise” as it relates to national security (Barrett & Kent, 2018). They examine altered images, including memes, and encourage people to be skeptical of what they see online.

Merriam Webster defines memetics as the study of memes and their social and cultural effects, something the defense department started taking seriously with the rise of social media. Dr. Robert Finkelstein, founder of the Robotic Technology Institute and a professor at the

University of Maryland University College with a background in physics and cybernetics, was commissioned by DARPA to lead a multi-year study of memetics (Siegel, 2017). DARPA supported multi-year projects from 2006-2009, which included Epidemiology of Ideas (to predict changing culture and the impact of ideas), Military Memetics (to determine whether memetics can be established as science with the ability to predict phenomena), Social Media in Strategic Communications (SMISC) (to determine tools to detect and counter adversarial memes), and Narrative Networks (to conduct quantitative analysis of narratives and determine their influence on individuals) (Finkelstein, 2011). Military memetics is specifically the “application of memes for national security,” as Finkelstein (2011) deems the study worthy because memes “exploit the psychological vulnerabilities of hostile forces to create fear, confusion, and paralysis, thus undermining their morale and fighting spirit.” SMISC follows a few objectives, with two in particular being to recognize persuasion structure and influence in social media and measure the effects of persuasion campaigns (McBride, 2017).

Prosser (2005-2006, p. iv) proposed the creation of a Meme Warfare Center to both generate memes and analyze “enemy, friendly and noncombatant populations.” With DARPA’s commissioned project soon following, Finkelstein (2011, slide 93) also proposed that the Department of Defense create their own memes through a Meme Control Center. It is unclear if the proposed meme center by either of these researchers was actually created or not, as it might be classified information. While the American military’s interest in examining memes as a means of cultural influence and proposed centers that would lead to the creation of their own memes to counter messaging illustrates the influence of memes as propaganda, memes have been used in other instances as well. Terrorist group ISIS used memes to broadcast messages to enemies and to recruit (Siegel, 2017). John Robb, a former Air Force pilot and counterterrorism

expert, proposed in his book *Brave New War: The Next Stage of Terrorism and the end of Globalization*, that wars against terrorism are wars against small bands of insurgents who can do major damage to large states using apparent small acts to cause sizeable disruptions. The U.S. military is at a disadvantage in creating something like memes to combat them because “the most effective types of manipulation all yield disruption” (Siegel, 2017). In other words, Robb does not believe memes are the best way to combat terrorism. Regardless, all of the military research and programs give justification to the idea that memes can be used as a method of propaganda to influence the populace.

Overall, memes and poster are visual images that have the capacity to make a more lasting effect than text can (Hill & Helmers, 2004). This can describe the rise in popularity of social media itself as we move toward becoming consumers of visual mediums and away from print.

RQ1: How do design elements and themes used by World War II-era Soviet propaganda posters (such as the portrayal of leaders/enemies, color, typography) compare to those in internet memes created by the IRA?

POSTER and MEME COMMONALITIES

Political theorist Harold Lasswell believed manipulation of the mass public was possible because of the tendency to react on impulse to emotional appeals rather than react to “sober analytic statements” (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019, p. 94). It was once again Aristotle's pathos that might be the most effective when it came to manipulation. Anger and fear were common pathos techniques in propaganda posters, particularly with the use of women or children in scary situations (Fenton, 2014). Posters often presented nightmare scenarios of what could happen if a

war was lost or an enemy won. However according to Fenton (2014), memes are more about an appeal to anger citizenry. Fenton (2014) rationalizes that the focus has shifted more to anger than fear because anger and dissatisfaction is most likely to motivate rebellion, even if these days rebellion comes more in the form of voting instead of revolution and upheaval (although that happens, too).

Similar to wartime posters, political memes can work as a propaganda method because they use images paired with slogans or phrases (Fenton, 2014). Propaganda posters' ability to mold public opinion is very similar to what occurs in this day and age (Stokoe, 2010). However, it is less in the presentation of a demonized enemy or nightmare scenario than in the omission of information. Fenton (2014) writes about how memes can frame someone in a way that benefits the meme creator since a viewer only has a quick glance of an image to make a judgement. This is a good explanation for the rise and success of social media bot accounts and "fake news."

The ease with which we can create a meme means that we are capable of reaching even more people now than were reached in the age of the propaganda poster. The ease of meme sharing can turn a cartoon animal like Pepe the Frog into a sign of the alt-right, and a Guy Fawkes mask into a sign of social justice (Heikkilä, 2017). For better or for worse, these existing semiotics evoke emotions, and their redefinition can give pre-existing texts new meaning. They are an indication that memes and internet culture can repurpose and "steal" existing images for propaganda purposes. In fact, several political memes even add captions to or digitally recreate wartime posters and photographs to give them a political bend in a direction they were not originally headed. Uncle Sam has made an appearance in memes because of what he evokes due to his appearance in posters.

In many ways, memes have a dangerous side that propaganda posters did not. Persuasive studies after both wars taught us about subliminal messaging and awareness of what propaganda is along with various techniques used. There was a large response to propaganda posters post-war as evidenced by the rise in social psychology and study on the lasting effects of propaganda consumption. In the new media age, people might be more consciously aware of controversial topics, but memes might mask that same messaging through the guise of entertainment (Heikkilä, 2017). If masked this way, meme topics can be acceptable and normalized instead of taboo.

Visual argumentation is still relevant today, only changing in which format the enthymeme is shared. Both memes and posters are image-specific communication tools. To summarize points made earlier in this work, messaging presented via visuals are processed faster than words, provoke emotional responses, and are remembered better than text (Brunner & DeLuca, 2016). The increase in users with image-specific platforms like YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram, and Snapchat illustrate how image-centric we have become as consumers. Smartphones and public Wi-Fi make our consumption of these images even easier. However, with this ease of consumption of images comes the possibility of consuming images that are lies. Much like propaganda posters, which could make up a wartime atrocity to mobilize the populace, images can easily be taken out of context or be given a negative connotation in a meme on the internet. Due to the ease that memes can be created and then reshared throughout the internet and go viral, memes are an example of black propaganda. Memes have the benefits of anonymity and social media algorithms to mask their propaganda message even better than posters could. Algorithms decide for us what we are more likely to see and be exposed to.

Chapter 3

Theory: Visual imagery and argumentation

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols coined by John Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Locke, 1748). His study views signs and symbols as a significant part of communication, a way for people to derive meaning from the world around them and interpret their environment. In semiotics, a sign is something that indicates something else, an object, with this sign being not just pictorial but based on any of the senses. Using semiotics, philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce theorized the triadic theory of icon, index, and symbol, a theory used most often by rhetoricians, according to Hill and Helmers (2004). The three categories of signs are defined based on how a sign is related to the object, or in other words, how each can be understood (Hill & Helmers, 2004). An icon is a representation of exactly what you see (they resemble the object they represent); an index implies a logical connection (a representation of something that does not exist, but we all know what it is, such as an alien); and a symbol is a matter of convention based on a specific culture or society (something culturally learned) (Hill & Helmers, 2004). Semiotics is important in many realms, such as in technology where websites are created with special attention paid to how an audience will interpret its symbols, buttons, or icons. It is useful for web designers to understand the language of signs to enhance their visual communication and develop conceptualization skills (Bennett, 2006).

When looking at visual propaganda, it is useful to keep these three categories in mind, particularly because visuals are representational images. When it comes to persuasiveness, Hill and Helmers (2004) stated that cultural and psychological influence is how persuasiveness works. Cultural influence is vital for the understanding of a persuasive image, otherwise

inhibiting a message if the viewer does not understand what it is saying. With psychological influence, Chaudhuri and Buck (1995) write that images, once again, are more likely to provoke emotional responses, whereas print is more likely to cause analytic responses. This would mean that there is a semiotic difference between images and words when it comes to emotions.

However, Hill and Helmers (2004, p. 30) counter those ideas as too broad—it is more about “imagistic and concrete words” that generate emotional responses. In other words, information that is vivid is more likely to give an audience something to relate to, a point of reference (Hill & Helmers, 2004). Due to verbal text being processed analytically, it’s possible that it’s processed systematically, whereas images’ instant interpretation is processed heuristically (Hill & Helmers, 2004). Therefore, vivid imagery has the capacity to elicit pathos, rendering it processed faster than text, thus justifying visual argument.

As Foss and Kanengieter (1992) wrote in their work, society has now changed, moving away from verbal text to visual images everywhere from television, to film, to billboards, to fashion, and of course now, the internet. Foss (1982) writes about how meaning is conveyed through a visual medium to a viewer by the creator due to the tonality, image, idea, etc. shared in the work (but only if both creator and viewer speak the same cultural language). Even though our society has moved away from words and more toward visuals, we still essentially “read” and interpret visual grammar through a form of visual syntax (Foss & Kanengieter, 1992). Reading goes beyond reading printed words and includes a knowledge of an almost visual grammar of interpreting what we see (Foss & Kanengieter, 1992). “Visual literacy” involves reading and evaluating how a piece of visual imagery might impact someone (Foss & Kanengieter, 1992, p. 313). A good example is how the tsarist pre-Russian revolution regime did not allow for public displays not allowed by government or the church, but the Bolsheviks created their own syntax

with the everyday worker as the hero (usually depicted as a blacksmith), one of a new set of standardized images they used in their regime iconography (Bonnell, 1999). One could say that a visually-literate person is able to break down and analyze visuals as well as words, opening up the use of reason as applied to visuals.

In keeping with what was discussed earlier in this work (that propaganda is a form of visual argumentation), Johnson (2000, p. 154) defines argumentation as the practice of “constructing, presenting, interpreting, criticizing, and revising arguments.” Even though Johnson (2003) himself refutes that argumentation can be applied to visual literacy (he thinks other methods of analysis such as semiotic theories are better), many researchers have written papers on visual argumentation. Slade (2003) applies argumentation to visuals in the advertising realm and reasons that visual argumentation is worth studying in the advertising context because it allows us to see underlying assumptions. These kinds of assumptions can apply beyond propaganda pieces and advertising to other modes of visual communication, such as political internet memes. Huntington (2016) applies Kjeldsen’s methods and frameworks to analyze rhetorical functions and argumentative claims of activist political memes. Kjeldsen (2015) believed that visuals do perform argumentation although they do so differently than with words. Images are a poorly-coded semiotics compared to words because there are many different ways to portray an index or a symbol, but verbal language is more strongly coded (Kjeldsen, 2015). Kjeldsen (2015) uses the example of a photo of a dog being open to interpretation depending on breed, domesticity, etc. He believed that to truly understand what a picture is showing, you have to decode it semiotically and aesthetically. (Aesthetically meaning feeling what the image conveys or the historical perspective of where it takes you.) However, Kjeldsen (2015) did not

believe this meant that argumentation could not be visual, only that the viewer would use a rhetorical enthymematic process to understand the premise.

Visual argument is rhetorical and not dialectic in that any symbolism must register immediately, consciously or not (Hill & Helmers, 2004). There may be some uncertainty, but if viewed in a shared culture, the argument could be viewed clearly. Argumentation is therefore part of rhetoric (Kjeldsen, 2015). These views emphasize why looking at stylistic similarities between posters and memes is important and worth analyzing. As Huntington (2013, pg. 2) writes “by considering memes as discourse and analyzing the semiotic elements in memes, researchers can examine how memes operate as rhetoric.” Semiotics also comes into play here as similar in the “reading” of signs, propaganda posters and internet memes also need some cultural background to be understood. Semiotics works in that when a person sees the word “dog” they can picture one in their head, as the same as seeing representational images or words in posters or memes would lead to someone picturing the intended messages. Semiotics works to have you understand what you see (whether through image or words) in posters or memes.

Argumentation theory involves drawing conclusions through logical reasoning. It is a theory applied to many fields but with persuasion it has to do with two opposing views and how one has to persuade the other. When applied to a visual element, such as a poster or meme, it only works if the viewer has some background information on the visual element itself. Smith (2015, p. 28) describes visual argumentation working if the original image carries “symbolic import” that carries its context to a new definition. In other words, if you repurpose an images’ original intent to give it new meaning (what a meme essentially does) you create a visual argument. This is also applicable to Russian propaganda posters because in order for “political art” to be effective, the artist must “speak the language” of the viewer and present images and

symbols they would understand (so as to build a proletarian culture) (Bonnell, 1999, p. 7).

Argumentation theory is therefore vital to this study because it examines the re-contextualization of images. What was the original context and how was it changed to fit a new argument? A viewer has to have some cultural understanding of both the original and new visual in order for argumentation to work. Kjeldsen (2015) wrote about the semiotic richness of images. Richly coded pictures not only provide backing to the claim that argumentation can be visual but also provide much material to analyze images with.

If anything, Kjeldsen (2015) is saying that images provide more richness than words could due to the multiple coding possible. They can do more than only words alone can such as convey emotion, put a viewer into a certain time and place, etc., almost appearing as a new language into itself. Visual richness is semiotic “thickness” (Kjeldsen, 2015, p. 202). Semiotics can help decode an argument if there is cultural understanding and richness decoding. However, with images, less decoding is required because images “place events visually in front of the audience” and benefit from immediacy (Kjeldsen, 2015, p. 207). Kjeldsen suggests that visual thickness makes for a better argument, or a fuller understanding of content. He makes the case for visuals working in argumentation, but also that visuals consist of semiotics that add to their capability to argue (or convince).

RQ2: How do visual arguments of World War II-era Soviet propaganda posters compare to visual arguments of internet memes created by the IRA?

RQ3: How do World War II-era Soviet propaganda posters and internet memes created by the IRA use emotional appeals?

Chapter 4

Methodology & Analysis

There is plenty of opportunity for further research in these topics. One can speculate that politically-oriented memes ultimately borrowed from visual styles and content from propaganda posters from the past, but it would be necessary to break down and analyze style elements in both mediums to see if this is true. This thesis analyzed internet memes created and widely-circulated by the Internet Research Agency (IRA) complete with analysis of their themes and meanings, and compared them with poster propaganda techniques used in the past selected from designers who worked for the Litizdat poster publishing house. The study concluded with making note of the similarities from the two visual mediums to see if visual propaganda techniques changed over the years or not.

The research questions proposed in this work were answered through a case study analysis of a selection of memes and posters and a deep-dive analysis of two memes and two wartime propaganda posters. The two memes selected for analysis are Figure 4-1 and Figure 4-2 as illustrated below:



Figure 4-1: Blacktivist meme



Figure 4-2: Army of Jesus meme

These figures were pulled from a listing of IRA memes found in Alfaro (2018), with the meme on the left pulled from the IRA-created Blacktivist Facebook page and the meme on the right from the Army of Jesus Facebook page. Alfaro’s article in particular was selected because it provided a broad analysis of various IRA-created content, in list format and with examples and brief explanations of the IRA-created page. Other articles that covered this subject matter took a deeper analysis of a few select examples. Alfaro’s listing allowed for less bias in selecting the individual cases and more matter-of-fact information. The more examples Alfaro presented also allowed for a more general overview of the content the IRA created and more opportunity to choose richer material in the sampling.

Figure 4-1 was selected because it has to do with unity, but also, as described earlier, has the often-seen component in IRA-created memes—that the focus is on black Americans specifically. A reverse google search reveals the image used by the IRA is a photograph by Stephen Shames that was also used in the 2015 documentary *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*. The image of Black Panther participants could be used either against or in

sympathy with black Americans' recent political struggles, but the text above the image, "never forget that the Black Panthers, group formed to protect black people from the KKK, was dismantled by us govt but the KKK exist today," seems to incite a positive reaction to the image and raise questions as to why this political organization no longer exists today.

Figure 4-2 was selected because it presents a possible enemy in reference to 2016 presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. The meme is an illustration of Satan and Jesus Christ appearing to arm wrestle, with images of hell and heaven in the background, and includes the caption, "Satan: If I win Clinton wins! Jesus: Not if I can help it! Press 'Like' to help Jesus win!" Although she is not depicted specifically, the visualization of Satan as being on "her side" would seem demonizing of Clinton. The image of Jesus is particularly notable, because its use could be to cater to Christian Americans and is meant as the contrast to what Clinton/Satan stand for. This particular meme makes an ask to viewers, asking for engagement with the meme in order to have Jesus "win." This would possibly lead to a successful resharing of the meme for those who agree with its message, a tactic often used by the IRA.

Both of these memes provide significant material for analysis when it comes to the use of an image and why certain words/images were used by the IRA. The images and the text by themselves provide many different design elements for analysis, as well as the opportunity to analyze emotional appeal. The intent of the message was different in both memes, especially when you take in consideration that they were created by a Russian agency and not by a black American political organization or religious group.

It is worthwhile to analyze whether meme messaging has borrowed Russian propaganda techniques of the past to influence and sway political opinion. The propaganda posters they will be compared to will be specifically those shared by the Soviet Union.



Figure 4-3: Dmitrii Moor poster



Figure 4-4: Viktor Deni poster

Similar to how the memes were selected from one source (the IRA) the posters are selected because they were produced by one publishing house, Litizdat with Figure 4-3 created by artist Dmitrii Moor and Figure 4-4 by artist Viktor Deni. Both the memes and posters selected are chosen based on their design richness. As described earlier, Kjeldsen (2015) believed the semiotic richness of pictures added value to their capacity to visually argue. It would be this richness that would provide substantial material this work could analyze. The selected figures were also purposely selected on the criterion of calls for unity and demonization of the enemy, two common criteria discussed prior in this work.

Figure 4-3 is named *Works of the World, unite!* and was selected due to its use of heroism, which was crucial for the Bolshevik calls to rise against imperialism. The main subject is a Soviet worker which is where the heroism component comes from. The worker is fearless and prominent in the work compared to the significantly smaller enemy figures. It is worth noting the stark contrast, as the heroic worker has a defiant, confrontational face and an element of the Soviet color red in his shirt to identify his alliances. The enemies, in contrast, are given no individual identifiers. The color red is also used in the typography and in the shadow the hero casts.

Figure 4-4 is a poster named *Each strike of a hammer is a strike against the enemy!* and depicts a worker striking an anvil to launch a hail of bullets at Hitler. It was selected because while its inherent focus is on workers and to some degree unity, this particular poster's main focus is on a particular enemy. While it does not demonize Hitler, it does depict him in a cartoonish way. The worker is more of a silhouette, which was discussed earlier as allowing any viewer to feel themselves capable of being. The silhouetted worker and the bombs he is emitting from his anvil are cast in Soviet red and appear prominent and strong compared to the almost dopey appearance of the Hitler cartoon.

Both of these posters are very similar in style, perhaps because they come from the same publishing house. However, while they both use similar color schemes with the Soviet red and secondary color black, their focuses are different. One is concentrated mainly on the defiant look of the worker, and the other one the dimwitted appearance of the enemy. Their simplistic design keeps the eye on this focus as they each work to persuade the viewer in a different way.

For this research, case study analysis was done to complete qualitative research. Qualitative examination allows for the close examination of complex relationships, and qualitative case study research allowed for a relationship to be examined through different lenses, meaning that we were given more opportunity to look at the different elements the images might share or differ on than if using a more stringent quantitative analysis (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Although there are quantitative and qualitative case studies, the qualitative method was used for this research to allow for more interpretations of what was reviewed in the hopes of uncovering something particularly unique. Stake (1995) stresses that a case study is intended specifically to capture the complexity of a case. As Stake (1995) wrote, it is the hope of a case study to lead to new understandings.

According to Yin (2017, p. 10), a case study analysis should be considered when the focus of the study is to answer “why” or “how” questions (which the proposed research questions are) because these kinds of questions deal with items “over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidence.” However, a “what” question is also fitting for a case study because it is exploratory (Yin, 2017). Overall, a case study analysis is recommended when one might be looking to explain a circumstance or describe a trend, which is something intended in this proposed research when looking at how propaganda poster techniques might still be used with memes.

Items were analyzed on various aspects of design such as use of colors and shared symbols. Specifically, there were analysis of **aesthetics**: use of overall darkness/light colors and shade; significance (if any) of chosen typography; and cultural significance of possible symbols (including visuals and words). When it comes to **content**, this work also: analyzed wording; looked at representations of the hero/protagonist; and looked at representations of an enemy. There also was analysis of overall **emotions** the respective figure might be trying to convey, and possible **visual arguments** of the respective figures.

After individual reviews, all of the figures were analyzed for similarities (an example being whether the posters or memes address similar ideas from their respective timeframes). It is in this analysis that RQ1 was explored and answered. Aesthetic and contextual elements were identified and compared in both mediums. An analysis on any visual arguments of selected mediums was conducted and whether they compare to each other to answer RQ2. The measurement of pathos as an element was a bit more subjective, but something that was addressed as we analyze their persuasive elements as well when looking at RQ3. The analysis of

emotions will consist of reviewing significance in the aesthetics or content of the overall image to analyze what, if anything, the poster/meme creator was trying to convey.

Based upon the completion of the literature review, a comparison of Soviet propaganda posters and IRA-created internet memes is a rather unique take on visual argumentation analysis. Prior works have taken on one medium or the other but not both at the same time, and with the reports on the IRA being released within the last two years, there is plenty of opportunity to examine particularly original works. It is proposed that the best way to do this research design is to break down the individual elements of each case separately before reviewing if all four figures have shared elements. Ultimately it is the hope that this research will expand on the concept of rhetoric-oriented tools to better understand the influence of visual rhetoric and understand why they were created in the first place while answering the “how” research questions.

Chapter 5

Blacktivist meme analysis



5-1: Blacktivist Meme

As stated prior, this meme has a photograph by Stephen Shames as the central image, with the inclusion of a mock logo (created by the IRA for their fake Blacktivist page) and wording above the photo. Shames' photograph is one of many he took of the Black Panthers, a group he refers to on his website as not encouraging of hatred and more about encouraging control in the black community (Shames, 2019). Together with Bobby Seale, a founding member of the Black Panthers, Shames co-authored a book of his photography that was released in October 2016 (Shames, 2019).

The particular photograph in the Blacktivist meme was one of Black Panthers lining up at a Free Huey rally in DeFremery Park in west Oakland, California in July 1968 (Lane, 2018). Called "Panthers on Parade" the photo graces the cover of the co-authored book released with Seale and is "probably the most widely published Panther image" (Tobak, 2018).

AESTHETICS: USE of OVERALL DARKNESS/LIGHT COLORS and SHADE

All of Shames' Black Panther images are taken in black and white. This could be pure photographer preference or the film that was available at the time. The Blacktivist meme maintains the original grainy black and white of Shames' photograph as it seems the same way on the cover of his 2016 book. The IRA uses black for the wording and inserts a black and white logo. Keeping the photograph in its natural state might also be a throwback and intent to evoke the time and place where this photo was naturally created. This might have been a deliberate attempt to remind black Americans of the 1960s when the Civil Rights Movement was at its height. As Lee, Deng, Unnava, and Fujita (2014, p. 1016) wrote, people tend to "associate BW versus color media with the distant versus near past." Any changes to the photography might have made it less likely that someone would have recognized that they were Black Panthers, would have made it appear fake or recreated, or could have made it lose its original presentation of disciplined black males, a key message important for the Blacktivist page to be believable as a pro-black American page.

Douglis (2008) explains how black and white photography is about abstraction and is useful for making a photograph's subject feel symbolic and universal. The IRA used different kinds of photographs and videos for their various Blacktivist social media accounts. For this particular meme, however, with the focus on something as symbolic as the Black Panthers for the African American community, there was deliberate intent with the selection of Shames' photograph. The way black and white contrast with each other, as opposed to if they used a color photograph, could be seen as a good visualization of the contrasts in racial tensions that existed at the time, the same type of tensions that are being seen once again now. As Douglis (2008)

described, color tends to neutralize contrasts, so black and white photographs can make the subject appear more symbolic and universal.

AESTHETICS: SIGNIFICANCE (IF ANY) of CHOSEN TYPOGRAPHY

The wording in the Blacktivist meme is using sans serif text (perhaps for easier understanding due to more legibility). The typography itself is not particularly significant although it is worth noting that the meme's caption is not written in complete sentences.

AESTHETICS: CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE of POSSIBLE SYMBOLS (INCLUDING IMAGES and WORDS)

There is a small symbol observed in the bottom right corner of the Blacktivist meme. The image is not part of the original photograph, so it was added using editing software. The symbol is an image of a clenched fist breaking through chains, what would be observed as a Blacktivist logo created by the IRA to give their content under this guise a branded look. The IRA probably used the clenched fist due to its close relation to the Black Panthers.

One of the semiotics most synonymous with the Black Panthers is the clenched or raised fist which athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos made notable when they raised their fists in the air during the National Anthem at the Olympic games in October 1968 after medaling in the 200-meter race. Often used as a symbol of resistance and unity, the clenched fist however was actually first seen in 1917 as a graphic image by the Industrial Workers of the World, popularized during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939, and afterward reimagined in 1948 by *Taller de Grafica Popular*, a print shop in Mexico (Cushing, 2011).

The clenched fist has been used in various propaganda posters of different eras and different causes. It was sometimes even combined with the hammer and sickle of the Soviet Union as a form of communist symbolism, or in later decades would convey feminism or be a symbol of Black Power by the Black Panthers (Cushing, 2011). Throughout the history of its repeated use, the clenched fist symbol is often used across the political spectrum. A few exceptions include President Donald Trump using the fist during his inauguration or the existence of a vector image of a Confederate flag juxtaposed over the image of a clenched fist found on CanStock.com. In recent memory it was used as the logo for the 2009 Taxpayer March on D.C. for instance (Cushing, 2011). Few other examples of right-wing use of the fist exist. Perhaps this might be because the clenched fist was established early as a defiant, left-wing symbol of resistance.

Use of the clenched fist fell after the 1970s, but makes occasional appearances (Cushing, 2011). The clenched fist is still a notable symbol showed in memes. Altenhofen (2010) wrote about how the "I <3 NY" logo was an attempt to change the attitude of the public. One can argue that the clenched fist is an attempt to portray power and resistance. It can be seen as a message that the political side or group with the clenched fist is defiant and united. By evoking an emotion, the clenched fist remains a powerful symbol in either posters or memes.

It would make some sense for the IRA to incorporate it in conjunction with black American politics, but the fact that they saw a need to use a logo at all implies some type of organization. It makes Blacktivist social media accounts appear as coming from an organized group of people rather than one person. While Black Lives Matter (BLM) does not have an official logo, one quick look at an Etsy or eBay shop selling BLM-inspired merchandise features a clenched fist practically identical to the clenched fist seen in the Blacktivist logo. This would

mean the fist used by the IRA must be available as a stock image somewhere and available for use by anyone. Also, its use by online merchants freely selling BLM merchandise with no apparent affiliation to the organization is a demonstrative example of how Blacktivist social media pages were able to gain so many followers without anyone questioning its legitimacy. People might be purchasing these products without realizing they are not benefiting BLM, who actually feature a merchandise store on their own website. Vetting the origin of meme-oriented pages and ecommerce sites peddling activist wares was not something often considered.

CONTENT: ANALYSIS OF WORDING

It is interesting that “us govt” is not written out completely or presented in its usual case. It almost looks written in haste. The lack of correct capitalizing and full sentences might be cause for one to think that the original writer’s first language is not English.

The Blacktivist twitter account often displayed awkward phrasing and used apostrophes the wrong way in various posts as seen in O’Sullivan and Byers (2017). If a page follower would have made note about the continued use of broken or improper English, they might have questioned who was creating the content. This did happen: when the Blacktivist Facebook account promoted political marches, one community organizer, Heber Brown III, did reach out to get more information about who ran the page and sent the page a message (Levin, 2017). The answers he received back were written in choppy English and a bit vague: “There are people in Baltimore. Volunteers. We are looking for friendship, because we are fighting for the same reasons” (Levin, 2017). Other real-life activists noticed that something appeared off and theorized that the page could be undercover police or someone exploiting their causes for publicity. When the truth of the IRA would eventually be revealed, these same activists voiced

how the experience taught them that they must be cautious before resharing information from an account without knowing who was creating the content (Levin, 2017).

CONTENT: REPRESENTATIONS of THE HERO/PROTAGONIST

Because we know the Blacktivist meme was created by Russians and not actual black Americans or Black Panthers, analysis of the protagonist is a little different. The IRA is the actual creator masked behind false social media pages meant to appeal to black Americans. If you want to look at the subjects of the photo itself, you can say that they appear in a positive light, the men in the photo are in a line and appear stern and emotionless as the Black Panthers were “street soldiers carrying out the work envisioned by the party leadership” (Tobak, 2018). Tobak (2018) describes the “power of the photo” lying in its anonymity with “quiet power communicated through imagery,” anonymity being a significant word. As stated earlier, the Russians used silhouettes as a way to present a hero as anonymous, giving the viewer of the image the possibility of picturing themselves as the person being depicted.

Tobak (2018) even makes mention of how the Panthers appeared this way in public because they knew what they were doing. They were “media- savvy” enough to have a photographer like Shames chronicle their life and knew the power of presentation and image (Tobak, 2018). Shames himself said “the Panthers were very conscious of their media image. They understood that this is America and image is everything” (Tobak, 2018). The Panthers often marched and appeared disciplined as a way to garner respect (Tobak, 2018). Panthers in Parade is a powerful photograph and considered one of the earlier photographs of the party, with later imagery more focused on their community programs and initiatives (Tobak, 2018).

The essential uniform of the Black Panthers was a beret and a black leather jacket, a look chosen for its simplicity and the likelihood that anyone could easily acquire that type of jacket (“Policing the Police,” 2015). The Black Panther look was “calculated” and “urban” (“Policing the Police,” 2015).

CONTENT: REPRESENTATIONS of AN ENEMY

If there is an enemy represented in the Blacktivist meme, it would be the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) which appears in name only and not so much represented in image-format. The KKK is a white supremacist group that was first established shortly after the American Civil War. However, that the IRA chose to put the KKK as the contrast to the Black Panthers is notable because they are “two of the most infamous racially-associated groups in the history of this country” (Allen-Bell, 2015, p. 1158). Allen-Bell’s (2015) work was dedicated to explaining how both groups are so different despite often being compared throughout their respective histories. The KKK was a strong influence in the intimidation of black Americans during Reconstruction, when federal troops were sent to the South to enforce the new rights given to black Americans by Congress (Allen-Bell, 2015). That the KKK have such a long history in the United States rife with lynchings and violence, with origins in opposition to the freedom of black slaves, would make them a source of anger, fear and pain for many black Americans.

That the KKK is not physically represented is significant. This figure makes mention but does not focus on the enemy. One can say that this was done on purpose to make the meme focus on instilling a sense of pride for the targeted audience rather than any demonizing of an enemy. If the image of a KKK individual or group were shown in their recognizable white hoods it might have been upsetting to black Americans and that shock might have worked against the

intent of increasing black pride rather than increasing black anger, although it is unclear with available information about Blacktivist if there might have been posts that did blatantly feature the KKK.

EMOTIONS: ANALYSIS OF EMOTIONS THE CONTENT CREATOR MIGHT HAVE TRIED TO CONVEY

As Tobak (2018) writes, Shames' photography was meant to show a different side than the "gun-toting militant" representation of the Black Panthers given by the media. The Black Panther men in the Blacktivist meme are shown almost heroically, especially in the context of a fake social media account aimed at "empowering" black Americans. The Black Panthers are a source of pride and influence for many black Americans. Although the Black Panthers disbanded in 1982, their ideology continued to permeate through modern culture as their imagery has influenced hip-hop culture to this day. By using the Black Panthers as the focal point of this meme, they are trying to play on the emotions of those who view them as a positive force.

In recent years, BLM is another movement that has come to the forefront for black Americans. BLM is an activist organization responding to police brutality cases against black Americans. However, the Blacktivist Facebook account even had more followers than the verified BLM Facebook account (O'Sullivan & Byers, 2017). This could be a sign that the Blacktivist account had more influence than BLM. The Blacktivist accounts released memes, videos, and general content intended to influence black Americans to not vote in the 2016 president election, endorse third party candidates like Jill Stein, or simply to disrupt American politics overall by encouraging marches and protests (O'Sullivan & Byers, 2017). They appear sympathetic to causes of interest to black Americans, sharing content that would instill a sense of

pride, honor, or anger – a need to mobilize. This is evident through some of the Blacktivist Twitter account posts that released such sayings as “black people should wake up as soon as possible” or “black families are divided and destroyed by mass incarceration and death of black men” alongside posts of videos of police violence against black Americans (O’Sullivan & Byers, 2017). These are arguments for mobility, reaction, and anger. To create such content, the IRA had to be well aware of existing racial tensions in the United States, and play into these divisions with emotion-inducing content, an element they could exploit to divide Americans.

The Blacktivist page also released targeted Facebook ads in Ferguson, Missouri and Baltimore, where large protests were held after police shootings (O’Sullivan & Byers, 2017). People were angry and upset by these occurrences, and the content the IRA created was meant to fan the flames of these emotions. Other targeted Facebook users included those who liked human rights and Malcom X (Hafner, 2017). The IRA were trying to locate users who felt pride in their community to influence their views with targeted content that seemed to align with their views.

The Blacktivist meme, complete with Shames’ iconic image tried to evoke pride, perhaps also anger. The intended audience members were black Americans, and by evoking these emotions they were trying to entice them to further feel a division. If one is not a black American and sees this meme, their emotions might be different. Because the Black Panthers were often depicted as militant by a greater audience, mention of them, seeing them in their disciplined stance, and also seeing the name of the KKK might actually work to scare or alarm someone. Someone who is not sympathetic to this imagery might have their perceptions off and might think that these are two militant groups. Therefore, the Blacktivist meme might be evoking two sets of emotions, one for those who agree with the message and another for those who do not.

POSSIBLE VISUAL ARGUMENTS

Analysis of the Blacktivist meme's possible arguments can be divided into analysis of Shames' photograph and the added verbiage of the IRA. As stated throughout this section, the Shames photograph is a classic image of the Black Panthers in the 1960s. The group controlled their image to project what they thought themselves as—a group meant to support and empower black Americans. By choosing this image of the Black Panthers, the IRA were showing a photograph that embodied a possible source of pride for black Americans. The image not appearing doctored also might be an attempt to remind black Americans about what others were doing in the decade's past, and encourage thought on what can be done now.

Aside from *how* the text is written, one should examine what exactly the text is saying. The wording says that the Black Panthers were “dismantled by the us govt” although their dissolution in 1982 was a natural state of leaders leaving the party and certain members participating in crime. There is no known government interference with the dissolution although some might believe otherwise. The KKK does exist today as the wording says, but so do new factions that bear the variants of the Black Panther name, the New Black Panther Party and the New Black Panther Party for Self Defense for example, although it is significant to mention that both these groups are listed as hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center. With the inclusion of these words, the IRA is making the Black Panthers appear as a victim of government interference and perhaps implying that, that same government is allowing the KKK to still exist. Such an argument would only work to further the intended pathos as discussed earlier.

Levin (2017) cites postdoctoral fellow Don Levin for his work assembling a database of U.S.S.R./Russian interventions in elections from 1946 to 2000. Within that timeframe, attempts to influence the outcome happened in nine national elections (Maclay, 2017). Levin argues that

the Russians were more likely to interfere in an election if their interests were endangered by one candidate over another (Maclay, 2017). The IRA is a continued example of Russian interference for political gain, although the level of their interference is particularly unique in their knowledge of what elements in American culture could be manipulated to further a divide in the country while presenting a political advantage for them.

Chapter 6

Army of Jesus meme analysis



6-1: Army of Jesus Meme

Like the Blacktivist pages, Army of Jesus was another set of fake social media accounts created by the IRA. These include Facebook and Instagram accounts, with many accounts by that name still up and running in both platforms, although it is unclear if they are the IRA-created accounts or various copycats. The Army of Jesus meme was actually part of a Facebook ad with the following wording in the post and not designed into the meme itself: “Today Americans are able to elect a president with godly moral principles. Hillary is a Satan, and her crimes and lies had proved just how evil she is. And even though Donald Trump isn’t a saint by any means, he’s at least an honest man and he care deeply for this country. My vote goes for him!” (Alfaro, 2018).

The origin of the image used in the meme is unclear, but it was used on various blogs and sites dedicated to religion and prophesizing. It is an illustration of Jesus Christ arm wrestling an

image of a would-be Satan. Satan can be identified by his horns and demonic look, but specifically because the word “Satan” is used, differentiating him from being a generic demon. According to Hafner (2017), Facebook’s metadata on the ad is available and it reveals that Facebook users who liked or followed topics involving God, Christianity, and the Bible and also conservative pundits like Bill O’Reilly or Rush Limbaugh were the target audience. However, interests in Christianity and political figures alone probably provided an audience “not narrow enough to be effective” (Shellnutt, 2017). Facebook would have probably required more money for the ad to run effectively; Facebook policies actually prohibit ads from implying a targeted group’s personal attributes (like religion), requiring the IRA to pay more to get them posted (Shellnutt, 2017).

AESTHETICS: USE of OVERALL DARKNESS/LIGHT COLORS and SHADE

The image in the Army of Jesus meme is a graphic representation instead of a photograph, which is to be expected with religious figures. The images of Satan and Christ follow images seen in religious texts and paintings. Satan is presented a bit darker in tone than Christ, with an apparent image of fire both on Satan himself and in the background behind him. Jesus Christ, in contrast, is depicted much lighter in tone with an image of nature and sunlight behind him. No doubt that they are meant to be in hell and heaven respectively. The darkness on Satan’s side is meant to exaggerate the apparent evilness that he has, versus the goodness that comes with the light on Christ’s side.

Depicting hell and heaven with the figures might have also been an attempt to further the evilness of Satan and the goodness of Christ to those who are religious and are familiar with these depictions. They could have been used for emphasis but also to help with identification.

That light and dark are a contrast, also emphasizes that there are two distinct sides. The sides are not just good or evil, but the shading and color if isolated mean there is a deep contrast. To allude that Satan or Hillary Clinton are one side, with that same side appearing hellish and unappealing (a hell) would make it impossible for anyone to consider being on it. There is not typically anything appealing about being in hell. Therefore, it would be impossible for anyone who trusts what this image is saying to be comfortable being in Clinton's side. These uses box in viewers of the image to make one choice.

AESTHETICS: SIGNIFICANCE (IF ANY) of CHOSEN TYPOGRAPHY

The typography used in the meme is not significant, other than it is sans serif which is deemed easier to read in passing. The wording is presented in colors that contrast with black so they can be easier seen.

AESTHETICS: CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE of POSSIBLE SYMBOLS (INCLUDING IMAGES and WORDS)

Within the meme, Christ's appearance is simple as he is not wearing a crown of thorns or near any religious symbols. His full beard and hair appear a darker brown, and he is wearing a draped robe. Although simple, with his beard and robe he can be universally identified as Christ.

He appears differently represented in the profile photo for the account. This image can be seen in the ad and not in the meme itself; it is a bit different in a few stylistic ways, but more significantly Christ is shown as wearing the American Flag, almost as if he is fully wrapped in it. The mixture of patriotism and religion is not something typically seen in artistic representation,

perhaps done as a direct appeal to conservative Christians while adding legitimacy to the Army of Jesus' intended targeted audience (Shellnutt, 2017).

The IRA intended to microtarget people who were both Christian and leaning toward supporting Trump anyway, reaffirming their prior beliefs on Clinton (Shellnutt, 2017). Shellnutt (2017) cites professor Kevin den Dulk that this microtargeting was meant to only harden pre-existing voting preferences for people who already knew who they were going to vote for.

Another semiotic in the meme is an apparent Army of Jesus logo used as a watermark appearing over the shoulder of Christ. One can conclude that it is a logo because in Shellnutt (2017) another Army of Jesus meme is featured that also has the watermark image. The logo features the name of the Army of Jesus above a Christ with outstretched arms, similar to the Christ the Redeemer statue seen above Rio de Janeiro. The Christ and the wording almost appear to be in a coin. It is not clear why the IRA would pick this interpretation of Christ in particular to serve as their logo, unless there is some connection between "redemption" and their statement on Trump. However, that they used a Christ with a draped American flag as a profile picture and not the logo there is interesting. If one looks at the profile photo, the meme and the logo, there are three different Christ figures in this Facebook ad. It would be coincidence and a bad attempt at branding by the IRA, or it could be a subliminal attempt to make it very obvious to a viewer that the Army of Jesus is intended to be a page supportive of Christianity.

CONTENT: ANALYSIS OF WORDING

There is more significance in the wording of the ad than the wording designed in the meme. Interestingly enough, however, it would have been the long wording in the meme itself

which caused the ad to not be very successful (Shellnutt, 2017). Facebook does not permit ads to have a lot of text and probably asked for the text to be removed or rejected it.

There are a couple things in particular that are said in the ad that are interesting things to examine. The word choice in the first sentence, “*Today* Americans are able to elect a president with godly moral principles,” might be a subtle shot at the immediate past president Barack Obama since he was leaving office in 2016. Conservative Christians who might feel like there has been an increase in atheism or a lack of religion in recent years might feel comforted with the use of the word “Today” as if electing a new president this meme claims has “godly moral” values might mean a turn in American religious trends.

The wording of the meme also calls Hillary Clinton Satan for “crimes” and “lies” that prove her evilness, although it does not provide any suggestion as to what they may specifically be. Donald Trump is acknowledged to not be “a saint by any means” but is still described as “honest” and someone who “cares deeply” for the country. This seems almost contradictory for a religious page to be okay with someone “not being saint” if he at least “cares for his country.” One would think religion over patriotism would be more valued on a page catered to Christians. It is also interesting to note how the ad ends with the phrase “*My* vote goes for Trump,” implying a singular person is writing the ad instead of a “We” who would be the Army of Jesus. That might be because the “Army” is not a collective, but with an image of Jesus Christ as the profile photo for the page and ad, it might also make it seem as if Jesus Christ Himself is writing the ad.

The ad text and the meme’s text are written in generally good English, with one sentence written in the ad text starting with “And” which is informal. This could have been done by sheer chance, lack of proper English grammar, or it could have been done deliberately to appear conversational so as to make a connection with the reader.

CONTENT: REPRESENTATIONS of THE HERO/PROTAGONIST

The IRA obviously hid themselves from being the creators of the page, but in the meme image there is a distinct depiction of respective sides: it is implied that you are either on Satan's side or Christ's side. It walks people into a corner of all or nothing, either the devil in Clinton or Christ. With those two options, Christians would choose Christ and therefore would be cornered into being against Clinton. Christ is the focus of the meme, the option to take over Satan. It is interesting to note that Clinton is alluded to as Satan, but her presidential counterpart Trump is not alluded to as Christ. He is merely "godly." This was perhaps done on purpose by the IRA as they tactfully approached the Army of Jesus creations with the intent of not offending Christians by disrespecting Christ's image or have anyone else represent Him.

Depictions of Christ are based on artwork through the ages and not necessarily what was in the New Testament. Similar to Satan, he is represented in human form. According to Martens-Czarniecka (2012) the depictions of Christ were inspired by descriptions of him in the Apocrypha, which are works written in between the Old and New Testaments. In Nubian murals, Christ is often dressed in the robes used in ancient times (Martens-Czarniecka, 2012). He is wearing this robe in Figure 6-1, and a version of it in the separate meme in Shellnutt (2017). In both Army of Jesus memes, however, Christ is represented in a contemporary way, almost like a man wearing a Christ costume. Also worth examining, is how he seems ready to almost take on the physical match-up with Satan, arm bent ready to wrestle, instead of serene, mild or peaceful. In the Shellnutt (2017) meme he also appears muscular, with a barren chest. In Figure 6-1, the robe, or himation, is white, a color symbolic of royal power, knowledge and spirituality (Martens-Czarniecka, 2012).

The scenery behind Christ is a nature scene, one of many depictions of heaven seen in artistic works. Perhaps picked for its general serenity, the images of nature here are used to further illustrate who the Christ image is, provide a big contrast to the hell depiction behind Satan, and further drive home the message that it should be the preferred side.

CONTENT: REPRESENTATIONS of AN ENEMY

Interestingly enough like with Christ, the Bible offers few details about what Satan would have looked like, leaving most of the representations known (including in the Army of Jesus meme) to Germanic artists from the Middle Ages (Dune, 2014). Even then he was a composite of what defunct and ancient religions and cults decided Satan and demons would look like (Dune, 2014). In Dune (2014), curator Bernard Barryte makes note that the horns often depicted on Satan's head have their origin in the gods of various cults in "the near east." According to Barryte, by the 15th and 16th centuries, Satan was well established as being "horned, bestial, furry" (Dune, 2014). In renderings influenced by John Milton's *Paradise Lost* Satan was almost given a sort of anti-hero status (Dune, 2014).

Satan is also curiously equal to Christ when it comes to the size and amount of space he is using in the meme image. In a way, this representation is almost saying they are equals as neither dwarf each other and one does not appear stronger than the other. In the Army of Jesus meme, Satan does appear muscular while Christ's arm is hidden under his himation. This could be done out of a respect for Christ, while intentionally giving Satan a more menacing look. Satan also is gritting his teeth and snarling, while Christ is more determined. However, to show Satan's biceps at all might just be done to further emphasize that this is an arm-wrestling match, because if not apparent it might appear as if the two are just holding hands.

Behind Satan, we see what looks like an intense storm of lighting and even a volcano in the horizon. Dante's *Inferno* was one of the earliest works to describe graphically what hell would have been like, although he would still depict Satan as more of a beast than a man which would come in much later works (Dune, 2014). It is important to make note that even in *Inferno*, not all depictions were of fire as seen in the Army of Jesus meme. The 9th Circle of Hell was Treachery and was actually a frozen lake—a deep cold that contrasts with the heat depicted in Figure 6-1.

EMOTIONS: ANALYSIS OF EMOTIONS THE CONTENT CREATOR MIGHT HAVE TRIED TO CONVEY

With so much focus on Christ, the IRA made it clear who their audience was, and everything they used in this meme was meant to play with their emotions and political leanings. Satan is not shown in any manner that can be interpreted as relatable or human. He is meant to be feared, and a fear of Satan is a fear is meant to be equal to a fear of a Clinton presidency. The wording in the ad adds to this well beyond just the imagery they use.

Apart from fear, it is worth examining how Satan and Christ appear to be in an arm-wrestling stance. This is combative and shows the opposite of fear—it shows confidence and confrontation. This is something the Army of Jesus did often, as another meme featured in Shellnutt (2017) also features Christ facing off against Satan, only in that meme Satan's head is literally replaced by Hillary Clinton's using photo editing software, and the two appear in more of a mixed martial arts stance complete with finger-less gloves. Rather than focus memes or created content on a fear of Satan, in these two examples, the IRA seem to want to get Christians

to feel like they can stand up and literally fight Satan/Clinton. That they can fight back and “win” if they choose Christ’s side.

According to Shellnutt (2017) the Army of Jesus posted primarily Christian messaging and images before they started posting memes with more obvious political leanings. It did not set out to be a Conservative page at first to the unassuming eye, but eventually the IRA made it become one. In Shellnutt (2017), Senator Mark Warner said that the Christian images were meant to lure people to the page. The images and messaging go beyond just being Christian in nature and pick at political divides. The Army of Jesus was a fake organization meant to make Christians attracted to the religious content, become followers and thus become susceptible to material with a more political slant. It is possible Christians may have turned away from the page once it got political. However, the emotion the IRA were going for was first based off of a recognition of piety and other elements of what it means to be a Christian, and then later focus on feelings correlated with patriotism or pride in Conservative values.

POSSIBLE VISUAL ARGUMENTS

If one correlated Hillary Clinton’s name with Satan since they are mentioned together, we can say that the IRA is making an argument for the both of them being on the same side. The divide is apparent between two options—if you are on Christ’s side, you oppose Clinton. To further make a viewer feel a part of a “side,” the meme is asking for viewers to engage with the post and “like it.” When you like a post on various social media, all you are really doing is adding to that page’s metrics of engagements. Some platforms make monetary gain from engagements or use engagement to improve visibility. Asking for a like would have increased the page’s placement in the Facebook algorithm (Shellnutt, 2017). Doing so will not influence an

election but will impact the smaller page, and more intently would create a deeper division in a viewer's personal politics.

One thing that engagement on a page does is pull a bunch of people together who agree with a message. If there are comments in addition to likes in support of what the meme is saying, it could lead people to speak and have conversations with each other. One thing social media has been doing a lot lately with algorithms, is leading people to only consume content they agree with and think that there are more people who think like they do. The IRA might have used this as a tactic to influence American politics: to divide and align Americans' political views. The IRA deliberately put together this image where Christ and Satan appear legitimate, due to their easily identifiable features and general appearance, with the intent of getting the attention of those who are Christians. They make mention of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton in the ad to make political arguments of one being "evil" in comparison with the one that has "godly moral principles" with the intent of getting the attention of those who are political. To do both at the same time would make an argument for one being inherently good and aligned with Christ, over one that is evil and aligned with Satan. The IRA's arguments in sharing and creating such content are intended to further these beliefs and create division.

Shellnutt (2017) wrote for *Christianity Today* cautionary advice to Christians about using social media due to being targeted for influence in fake pages like the Army of Jesus. Particularly she explains how engaging with social media content sets Christians up to receive more content of that kind (due to algorithms), and she encourages Christians to check on their security and ad preference settings.

Chapter 7

Analysis of two memes



Figure 7-1: Blacktivist meme



Figure 7-2: Army of Jesus meme

To recap, Figure 7-1 and Figure 7-2 are images created and shared by the IRA for purposes of manipulating targeted American audiences and influencing political division going into the 2016 presidential election. Both memes use similar elements of persuasion, but vary in their technique and application. Each individual figure is different in that they are shared on different accounts with different target audiences, although the accounts they were shared on used the similar branded logo technique to appear like they originated from an organized group.

In order to make these types of images effective, the IRA did their research well and shared these figures through both IRA-created accounts and ads (Alfaro, 2018). They had a high level of understanding of how social media works with both free and paid initiatives used in these two examples. Facebook would ultimately disclose that Russia bought \$100,000 worth of

political ads during the 2016 presidential election alone (Levin, 2017). These accounts did everything to appear legitimate.

AESTHETICS

Both memes make use of the color black. However, Figure 7-1's original photo comes in that color, while Figure 7-2 uses it as background for the meme caption. Figure 7-1 is using a well-known photograph in its natural state without any alteration. While all representations of religion are artist interpretation, Figure 7-2's image was created specifically to show a match between good and evil. Overall what both memes show, however, are contrasts. Figure 7-1 has contrasts in its use of white and black, and Figure 7-2 shows more of a contrast with Satan/evil being in darker shading than Christ who is in lighter shading. In a way there are different uses in both figures; in Figure 7-1, the black and white Shames photo is not meant to necessarily show two sides or "good or evil" but instead the figure uses the darker shade for the emotional pull of recognition of the Black Panthers who are meant to represent the recognizable, relatable side. In contrast, in Figure 7-2, the darker shade is the evil, contrasting side.

These contrasts could be used to exaggerate differences, a symbol of the intent behind the memes (to *divide* American interest groups). Such contrasts in shading also emphasize that there are *two* distinct sides. There is no grey area; there's the side you want to be on, and then there's the side you definitely do not want to be on. It might appear difficult to say definitively that this was the IRA's intent, but it is noticeable. It places the viewer of these memes in a place where they identify with one of the sides, and makes them uncomfortable with the idea of being on the other, specifically because the "other" side is a natural enemy of the side you are supposed to sympathize with.

Both memes use sans serif font, which as described much earlier in this work as a chosen typeface for when someone is seeing something in passing.

Both memes feature a watermark logo that features a symbol important or well-known to the target audience. The Blacktivist meme features a raised fist that has long been synonymous with the Black Panthers (the subject of the meme). The Army of Jesus meme features a Christ figure with open arms, a symbol that is familiar to Christians, but also a smaller version of the subject of the meme, Christ in his match against Satan. The IRA more than likely used these logos as a way to give both memes a branded look, so that all of their content appears to come from one source. Aside from serving as a form of marketing, this branded look might have also been used to give these accounts an official look, as if created by a group that is organized, and not just an individual.

The IRA optimized their uses of symbols and imagery in their memes quite well. In the United States one can say that images of the Black Panthers and Christ are universally-known as images of history and faith respectively. The IRA had to have had a good grasp of American politics and divisions to know which symbols would resonate with the groups they were microtargeting. Not only the watermark logo, but the black beret and leather jackets the Panthers wore, and the bearded, robe-wearing appearance of Christ are also used to help identify and further solidify any reverence for those respective symbols. There is no symbol for the KKK, but Satan with his devil horns works the same way. The IRA chose symbolism (whether in the logo or overall imagery) that would create sources of pride and assurance in these targeted audiences. It was Shellnutt (2017) who made mention that these stylistic decisions were to strengthen pre-existing political preferences for people who already knew what they thought. The IRA created a sense of a safe haven, fake accounts; they did not just create these memes without a plan.

CONTENT

Figure 7-1 uses wording strictly on the meme itself, whereas Figure 7-2 adds to their messaging by using wording in the Facebook ad apart from what is in the meme itself. Also, in their wording, neither meme nor ad uses fully-correct English grammar. However, the Blacktivist meme's caption is worse because there is no attempt to have it written in complete sentences. This was actually a trend in other Blacktivist social media accounts (O'Sullivan & Byers, 2017). If a social media follower had been observant of these errors and properly vetted these accounts, they may have begun to question who was creating these memes and running these pages (something that ultimately happened with Figure 7-1) (Levin, 2017).

Social media is filled with accounts that cater to a specific interest group. Repeatedly viewing images and messaging that they agree with might reinforce these interest groups' preexisting ideas, and skew their perception. By making mention of the KKK to a page directed at black Americans, and mentioning Satan to a religious-minded group, they are introducing an anthesis to what that group believes in. Figure 7-1 only mentions this group in writing, while Figure 7-2 shows you an interpretation. Figure 7-1 also used an image, of the Black Panthers (a group revered in some black communities), whereas Figure 7-2 both shows you the image of Christ *and* uses verbiage like "godly and moral" and "crimes and lies." Figure 7-2 mentioned Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, who are political figures, to evoke not only contrasts in religion with the religious figures, but also contrasts in politics. It was a bit more blatant in its political narrative than Figure 7-1, which is playing more on the history of the black community who has been a target of the KKK.

The IRA's persuasion was very subtle and secretive that for a consumer of this messaging, these memes are simply reinforcing what they believe in and, at face value, were probably deemed to be created by a fellow sympathizer of their ideals. It was not until the IRA's involvement with the creation of these memes was revealed that some people began to think about how their buy-in into a meme's message (measured by engagement and reshares) was a result of a manipulation (Levin, 2017).

The IRA's plan extended beyond just what they were creating to how well they targeted who would view these figures. Tobak (2018) described how the power of the Shames photograph lied in its anonymity with "quiet power communicated through imagery." As stated earlier, the Russians used silhouettes as a way to present a hero as anonymous, giving the viewer of the image the possibility of picturing themselves as the person being depicted. For Figure 7-1, they were doing the same by making the targeted audience feel like they could be one of these anonymous Black Panthers.

In contrast, for Figure 7-2's protagonist, Christ, the idea was not to identify with him, but feel empowered and capable of standing up for what he is supposed to embody. The IRA were smart enough to know that they can call Donald Trump "godly" but they cannot compare him to Christ and expect to maintain credibility with conservative Christians. Regardless, they took the approach of making Christ appear a bit aggressive, and ready to arm wrestle. This is a different take, a more hostile approach, than what they did with the Black Panthers who are calmly standing in formation. The IRA could have made Figure 7-2 calmer they could have removed the armed wrestle stance between Satan and Christ, but they intentionally chose not to.

In Figure 7-1, the enemy is the KKK which appears in name only and not so much represented in image-format. In contrast, the enemy in Figure 7-2, Satan, appears both in name

and facially visualized, and he is given an atmosphere around him (hell). The KKK does have something in common with the Black Panthers; they are two of “the most infamous racially-associated groups in history” (Allen-Bell, 2015, p. 1158). Similarly, Satan and Christ share the same duality in that they appear as two completely contrasting figures and opposing forces since antiquity. The KKK would be a source of anger, fear and pain for many black Americans. For Christians, Satan can be a source of fear, but the emotions are less raw due to not having a history of struggle against them like the KKK has with minority communities in the U.S.

For Figure 7-1, an enemy is mentioned but is not the focus of the piece. The meme focused on empowering the targeted audience rather than any demonizing of an enemy. Blacktivist accounts were created to increase black pride, gain trust, and motivate followers to not vote or vote for less relevant candidates. For Figure 7-2, the enemy is not the focus of the piece either, but one can say that the focus is on a war or battle against a Satan (which in this case is supposedly Hillary Clinton). Here, in a way, the arm-wrestling match between good and evil makes Satan and Christ to appear as equals. There is literal demonizing of Clinton by implying that she is Satan. However, Satan is not smaller or dwarfed by the meme protagonist. The protagonist is not glorified in tandem.

EMOTIONS: ANALYSIS OF EMOTIONS THE CONTENT CREATOR MIGHT HAVE TRIED TO CONVEY

The IRA knew that there was revered messaging within these microtargeted groups that they could use to manipulate the emotions of their respective targets. The Black Panthers are a source of pride and influence for many black Americans, while the KKK perhaps embody their biggest enemy and adversary. The same argument pertains to Figure 7-2 where you have Christ

and Satan which are the biggest adversaries and the embodiment for anthesis known to those even outside Christianity. The IRA chose their heroes knowing that they were positive forces in the lives of these interest groups. They chose their enemies knowing they would cause emotions of anger, hurt, or fear.

Figure 7-1, complete with Shames' iconic image, tried to evoke pride, perhaps also anger. The intended audience members were black Americans, and by evoking these emotions they were trying to entice them to further feel a division. If someone who does not feel sympathetic to this image sees this meme, their emotions might be different when taking it at face value. Because the Black Panthers were often described as a militant group by a greater audience, seeing them in their disciplined stance and seeing the name of the KKK might actually work to scare or alarm someone and not evoke pride.

An interesting thing about memes, is just how viral they can become. They are easily shared, with memes and videos easily going viral on social media. Although Blacktivist and Army of Jesus were accounts that shared similar content, a meme had the power to go beyond these accounts' pages, stand as individual messaging and spread to other people whether they sympathized with its messaging or not. Like what Senator Mark Warner said about Christian images in Shellnutt (2017), these figures were meant to lure people back to the source page. The IRA were going for initial recognition of these images and emotions, but the context of the added verbiage on pages that constantly shared this type of messaging could expand the initial feelings when seeing these memes. In other words, these memes' easy shareability could also work as a recruitment tool to bring others to these pages.

POSSIBLE VISUAL ARGUMENTS

Figure 7-1 is manipulative not only in the use of the image of the Black Panthers in the Shames photograph but also the inaccurate claim they were “dismantled by the us govt” (even though their dissolution in 1982 had no government involvement). It is putting an image of an actual event and time together with words that are not only not related, but not accurate. Figure 7-1 is arguing that the KKK exists today because the government has not gotten involved with them, although they did with the Panthers. Without the meme’s caption, Figure 7-1 actually still works as a manipulation because it is shared on the Blacktivist page. The IRA created the space for the meme to be shared, and lured people to that space by being sympathetic to the messaging.

Figure 7-2 contrasts this because the image it uses is not an original, recognizable image among conservative Christians. Arm wrestling is a fairly new activity, popularized in the last few decades, and not a common pose to find religious figures. The image by itself is not particularly notable, it is the extra wording added to it; and the wording in the Facebook ad that make it propaganda.

Both figures present the idea of two sides, of an “us” and a “them.” Figure 7-1 does not ask for an immediate call to action, whereas Figure 7-2 does, furthering the idea of an “us.” The “we” implied by these figures and where they are shared are good, sources of pride and reverence. The “them” are sources of evil and hate. Aside from the visual arguments of the memes themselves, it would be remiss to not see the power of sharing them in agent-created social media accounts. These fake accounts acted in a persuasive manner themselves because they are meant to isolate group factions, appearing almost exclusive to them. The accounts themselves were able to gain their trust, setting up their visual arguments to work.

To recap, here are the similarities between Figures 7-1 and 7-2, the meme figures:

Table 7-1 Meme Figure Commonalities

| | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Mememes were meant to create divisions | Heroes are not the same |
| Both make claims | Use contrasting shades/colors |
| Reuse/repurpose images of significance | Improper English is used |
| Enemy is named | Both use substantial wording |
| Feature logos for the fake accounts | Authors were anonymous/secretive |

Chapter 8

Works of the World, unite! poster analysis



Figure 8-1: Moor poster

Dmitrii Moor (born Dmitrii Orlov) rose to prominence as an artist during the Russian Civil War, starting his career as a satirical artist before siding with the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution (Bonnell, 1999). The publishing house he designed for, Litizdat, produced a high volume of his work. Aside from being known for his satire and depictions of capitalistic enemies, Moor was also one of the first poster artists to give the male worker a female counterpart (Bonnell, 1999). He was known for several decades as the “unofficial ‘commissar of propagandistic revolutionary art’” for producing “some of the masterpieces of Soviet political art” (Bonnell, 1999, p. 11).

According to the website of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMa) in New York City, Figure 8-1 is a Moor-created lithograph named *Works of the World, unite!* created in 1941 (Museum of Modern Art). The full image almost looks to have been created in two panels, with a larger focus on the right side in various research projects and sources such as Stokoe (2010). The

right-side version alone consists of a large image of a worker facing a much smaller image of someone in military uniform. However, the full image of both parts provides much more materials for analysis. The left side shows another man of equal size to the right-side worker. This large man looks as if he is wearing a top hat while having a small swastika on his shirt sleeve by his wrist. This character also has four small figures below him, including two that are representational of religion due to artifacts they are wearing or holding, and another is wearing a beard, glasses and suit. All, along with the one in military uniform, appear to be angry toward the worker who stares back at the top hat-wearing man in an equally angry stare. Moor's depiction of workers and enemies was actually in keeping with Orthodox tradition that presented things in a binary fashion – there could only be villains and heroes (Dobrenko, 2009).

AESTHETICS: USE of OVERALL DARKNESS/LIGHT COLORS and SHADE

Figure 8-1 is a simple poster when it comes to use of colors or shading. The poster features only three colors, a dark black color, white and red. The white is the background of the entire poster, and black is used as the color of all of the characters big and small. The red color is probably the most notable due to its limited usage. It is used to accent the face of the worker as if it were a shadow and makes a red pendant on his shirt. If one looks closely, this red pendant features what looks like a red raised fist at the center. As discussed previously, the raised, clenched fist is often used as a symbol of resistance both in contemporary photographs but also posters. However, its appearance in a 1941 lithograph would make it one of the earliest appearances. Red is also used to accent the religious garments of the two smaller figures on the left. One figure has a red ferraiolo and hat, and the other a red zucchetto and vestments robe. This second person is also holding a long, red cross directed toward the worker. Red can also be

seen as the outline of the face of the small bearded man raising his arm toward the worker, and the boot and arm of the small military uniform-wearing figure. The Russian slogans at the top of both sides of this lithograph are also red.

According to Bonnell (1999), color symbolism is used to convey meaning in Soviet propaganda posters. Red has had much symbolism throughout the ages and has been associated with revolution since 1792 when the French Jacobins raised a red flag as a symbol of rebellion against autocratic governments during the Reign of Terror (Bonnell, 1999). The red banner became associated with socialist activities in Europe during the 1800s such as when it was adopted as the official flag of the Paris Commune of 1871 because the red flag symbolized “a single class, that of workers” (Nickel, 2001, p. 21). In Russia, red flags became popular during the Russian Revolutions of 1917, with the hammer and the sickle adopted as the official Soviet emblem in 1918 (Bonnell, 1999). Since then, red has become synonymous with communism and is perhaps the reason that the flags of China and Vietnam in addition to the Soviet Union’s flag carry red. During the American Red Scare of 1919-1920, many states even went as far as banning the display of red flags (Barton, 2019).

Red is also an apparent “holy color” when used in connection with figures that merited veneration (Bonnell, 1999, p. 13). This might explain why the two smaller figures in religious attire have red elements in their clothing. All of the religious attire, and the cross, appear in red perhaps as just a means to help identify who these individuals are and keeping with the holy color idea. Identification also works for the red shadow on the face of the worker and the red clenched fist pendant he is wearing. However, as for the red accent on the boot and arm of the figure in military uniform, or the face of the bearded man, identification might play less of a part. It would take further analysis to decipher what Moor’s intentions were with color use there. It

could be used as an accent color, as it does appear more maroon in nature and less comparable with the Soviet red seen in the rest of the poster. As for the use of black, this color could have been chosen due to its severity and seriousness to underscore the confrontational situation between the workers and the five figures facing him. Black is also a color used to denote evil (Dobrenko, 2009).

AESTHETICS: SIGNIFICANCE (IF ANY) of CHOSEN TYPOGRAPHY

Per Sakk (2012), Soviet fonts were limited in quantity with one sans serif typeface, Zhurnalnaya Roublennaya, appearing quite extensively during the time period. Berthold was used before the revolutions but by 1930, Russia sought to create their own new, unique Russian fonts (Sakk, 2012). The first typeface was called Literaturnaya and introduced in 1936, followed by Zhurnalaya, and soon others. Interestingly enough, it became common for Soviet fonts to copy Western ones (Sakk, 2012). Zhurnalnaya roublennaya was known as a “poor man’s Futura” (Sakk, 2012).

AESTHETICS: CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE of POSSIBLE SYMBOLS (INCLUDING IMAGES and WORDS)

In Figure 8-1, the attire of all of the characters is worth examining as they are symbolic in not only identifying who they are but when laid out together provide messaging of what the poster was saying and intending to relay to anyone viewing it. The worker is identified as such due to his news boy hat, and the red, clenched fist pendant he is wearing. One can presume that the four figures facing the larger worker in an argumentative stance are there to symbolize

fascism and capitalism. The attire of the small military uniform-wearing man and the type of gun he is holding are symbolic as they depict fascists, specifically the gestapo uniform of Germany.

Soviet villains were identified through symbols. This is deliberate through use of symbols such as the top hat (a good symbol of capitalism and the bourgeoisie), the gestapo uniform and the symbol of the swastika added discreetly to the man's shirt cuff. As discussed previously, top hats were, for a time, a symbol of bourgeoisie status or a "tsarist crown" as described by Bonnell (1999). It was post Russian Civil War that capitalists stopped being represented as monsters and more with items of top hats or cigars (Bonnell, 1999). The swastika on the cuff link and the representation of miniature priests and German Social Democrats is actually not an original idea by Moor for Figure 8-1. He used these ideas in other posters, and these exact same symbolic images are used in a poster by an anonymous artist in a work known as "Against the Working Class" (Bonnell, 1999). That this type of imagery would continue to be seen in other works might be explained by a factor similar to branding or marketing: to see the same imagery repeatedly might mean to help reinforce it and help viewers identify these enemies better.

The symbolization of the religious characters, identified through their religious attire and the holding of a cross, is different because that moves analysis of Figure 8-1 beyond just political parties. At the time of the Revolutions, the Russian Orthodox Church was integrated in politics, which meant that for the Bolsheviks to succeed, they would take a negative approach toward religion. An anti-religious campaign was part of the First Five Year Plan (Bonnell, 1999). The Communists would tear down religious houses of worship, execute religious leaders and do anything they could to eliminate religion. This was a policy of Marxist-Leninism until they eventually became more tolerant to religion by the 1930s. To have two religious figures confrontational toward the worker, means there is hostility between these two opposing sides.

Attack on religion through political posters was not abnormal, although in other posters religious figures were meant to look “scheming and evil” or even foolish (Dobrenko, 2009, p. 688). The intent was to make religion appear like a threat, with most attacks aimed at Russian Orthodoxy or Roman Catholics. The image of a priest was meant to represent oppression, with eventual art moving to giving priests a cartoonish almost animalistic appearance, much like the representation of other Soviet enemies.

CONTENT: ANALYSIS OF WORDING

The slogans at the top of the poster are written in Russian with the exception of the “Worker of the world, unite!” statement, which is written in English and is the name of the piece. Google Translate offers an extraordinary option via camera mode to translate text on any device using their app. Using this feature, one can see that the Russian wording on the left reads “Against the class of operators” while the Russian wording on the right says “Proletariats of the world, united!”

The name of Figure 8-1 comes from the phrase “Workers of the World, Unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains,” which is an English translation of Russian phrasing found in the fourth chapter to close out *The Communist Manifesto* (Engels & Marx, 2004). The phrase would become the official Soviet Union state motto and appear in the State Emblem of the Soviet Union. Its use in Figure 8-1, notably also in Soviet red, is a recognizable attempt to tie Soviet values and identification to the worker character image. All of the characters opposite the worker on the left are facing him, and Moor was deliberate in putting them under the slogan “Against the class of operators.” Due to his top hat one can say that the large figure represents the bourgeoisie

and the smaller four characters represent capitalists/fascists. Nevertheless, they all oppose and are enemies of the lone worker on the right.

The only other writing in Figure 8-1 is the “С. Д.” initials which appear at the podium of the small bearded man. It is likely that this represents the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) whose initials (S.D.) in Russian match those letters. This party had internal conflicts after World War I with one portion consisting of orthodox Marxists who believed in liberation of the working class being accessible only by revolution (Conradt, 2018). The party’s support of German involvement in World War I led Rose Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht to co-found the anti-war Spartacus League that eventually became the Stalinist Communist Party of Germany (Conradt, 2018). This Marxist split led to antagonism toward the SDP for their support of the war and siding with capitalists (Seidman, 2008). It is possible the bearded character is a representation of the SPD during their period of vilifying Stalinist USSR.

CONTENT: REPRESENTATIONS of THE HERO/PROTAGONIST

When the Bolsheviks took power there was no visual image representative of the working class, so one had to be created (Bonnell, 1999). The hero of this poster is the representation of a worker. The worker in Figure 8-1 is the same size as the top-hat wearing man but significantly larger than the much smaller figures, dwarfing them in size. His face makes a red shadow no doubt, as discussed earlier, an attempt to help identify him as a Soviet worker in particular. This character is done in the same style as another of Moor’s pieces, a poster for a film *Ubiitsa*, which depicts a man almost leaning toward something, while he shows his face to the audience only in profile.

Moor keeps his worker somewhat anonymous, but he has no known workers equipment, or bares no Soviet insignia or uniform other than his red pendant. This could be a deliberate attempt to keep him vague and somewhat relatable. In the world of propaganda analysis, Moor is using a plain-folks device—an attempt to gain confidence by appearing to be just like the viewer or “plain folks” (Dobrenko, 2009, p. 687).

While his newsboy hat might be an indicator of his worker status, it really is the red pendant he is wearing that identifies him as a Soviet worker. As described earlier, color symbolism is significant as color is used with intention. Bonnell (1999) wrote about how workers could be shown in a poster wearing a red ribbon or holding a red flag. It was Belgian sculptor Constantin Meunier who is largely responsible for giving worker depictions an almost hero status; a worker “showed signs of heavy labor and exhaustion, [but] they also convey pride, dignity, and strength” (Bonnell, 1999, p. 31). The way he seems to tower over his enemies is also a common aspect of World War II propaganda posters. The device known as “perspectival distortion” is meant for the Russian worker to appear larger-than-life, a subject of heroization (Bonnell, 1999, p. 33). To feel aligned with such a figure, represented by him, could be a source of pride in Soviet workers.

CONTENT: REPRESENTATIONS of AN ENEMY

After the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks introduced the terms “capitalist” and “burzhui” (a word considered vulgar that was a play on the Russian word for bourgeoisie) to describe the social class disparaged by Marxism-Leninism (Bonnell, 1999). Moor was known for producing satire, and was particularly known for his images of capitalist, burzhui enemies (Bonnell, 1999). According to Bonnell (1999), Moor’s burzhui depictions were mean to incite

disgust, often not even appearing in human form but in something more cartoonish or grotesque ways. The depiction of enemies, both foreign and domestic, played a significant part of visual propaganda since the Russian Civil War because they were to portray foes in pursuit of the destruction of the Soviet Union (Bonnell, 1999).

Fascists were demonized enemies of the Soviet Union in posters since before World War II, but continued throughout with almost animalistic portrayals of German and Italian fascists (Bonnell, 1999). Soviet villains were identified through symbols, and there were often recurring characters such as the capitalist, the tsar, the monarchist or the Menshevik (Bonnell, 1999). They were also often given sub-human qualities. The enemies of Figure 8-1, however, are not really given the Moor satirical treatment. The four characters appear human and recognizable, although their posturing and facial expressions make them appear unlikeable. The image of the swastika and the gestapo uniform as discussed earlier work as identifiers of who these people are. With the exception of the large top-hat wearing man, the smaller characters do have a form of anonymity since their faces are too small so as to appear insignificant.

When looking at this poster your eye is drawn first to the top-hat wearing man due mainly to his sheer size and comparison to the worker. Aside from this top-hat, he also appears strong/big, and takes up a lot of space. This might be intentional as in Soviet posters villains were meant to appear well-to-do and plump, hated for many reasons, among them that they had eaten well and had good access to food (Bonnell, 1999). Overall, per Dobrenko (2009), an emphasis on enemies in Russian propaganda posters was crucial to their narrative and artists would find creative ways to make them capable of being hated in Soviet Russia.

EMOTIONS: ANALYSIS OF EMOTIONS THE CONTENT CREATOR MIGHT HAVE TRIED TO CONVEY

Aside from the messages of the slogans, another key way emotion is conveyed is with the facial expressions and posturing of the characters. The worker and the top hat-wearing capitalist/fascist appear to be locked into each other. The worker is staring angrily and the top hat-wearing man is talking to him as indicated by his opened mouth. They are leaning into each other as is expected with two individuals who are having a confrontation. The four small characters appear on the poster as if they do not concern the worker, but perhaps they are there to further the identity, intentions or meaning behind the top-hat wearing man. Knowing Moor is a Bolshevik artist, one can infer that the worker character is the hero of the poster while the man with the swastika and his four smaller characters are the enemies.

According to Bonnell (1999, p. 203), Moor's depictions of enemies in his works often provoked hatred and "a desire to finish off the enemy, without leaving a trace" rather than appear humorous. The focus of Figure 8-1 is not on the worker or the enemy character singularly but on their *hostility*. The worker has a gun pointed at him, a cross thrust at him and five people confronting him. However, the lone worker is not ruffled by their actions or posturing toward him. Based on his facial expression you can tell he acknowledges what is going on but he does not shrink back, nor does he attack them in turn. If this is the beginning of a confrontation, he is taking in what is being thrown at him, but he is not afraid nor reacting just yet.

It is possible Moor intended for the worker to demonstrate a resiliency toward capitalist/fascists and the intent of Figure 8-1 is to encourage viewers of the poster to feel inspired by his ability to stand up against the forces that are against him. Russia is a large country, and the Communists knew they needed to focus on the working class in order to form

solidarity among them to maintain their strength (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019). Communism was gaining interest worldwide and more people were becoming disillusioned with capitalism as individual economies were not doing so well (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019). The depiction of the worker here is to gain a sense of pride in the Soviet's ability to be able to take on their enemies—to instill in viewers a sense of possibility and community.

POSSIBLE VISUAL ARGUMENTS

It was post Russian Civil War when it was established that heroes and enemies would be characterized with distinct visual indicators (Bonnell, 1999). In keeping with the tradition of Orthodox religious art, the depictions of worker-heroes and class enemies became standardized images (Bonnell, 1999). A main take away of Figure 8-1 is that the worker is defiant and standing up to the enemy. Moor was perhaps intending to empower workers to feel themselves larger than life and capable of taking on adversaries. The small and insignificant appearance of enemies is done to make them appear capable of being fought. The fact there are so many is also intentional so as to give viewers a large reference of possible enemies, not only in what they represent but in their number—five against one. Despite the appearance of a potentially deadly weapon (the gun), the gestapo character is not able to do much against the much larger worker. Analysis and mention of perspectival distortion is valuable, as it is interesting to think about why Moor chose the sizes of his characters. His intention with making the top hat-wearing capitalist the same size as the worker might be as simple as what Bonnell (1999, p. 195) describes as when “a giant enemy demanded a giant hero.”

Also interesting is thinking about *why* the Soviets need to continually see visualizations of enemies, so as to almost have someone to hate. As Bonnell (1999) described, even Civil War

holiday celebrations featured representations of enemies in cages on floats. This went with the idea of an enemy being an animal and worthy of being in a cage. Dobrenko (2009, p. 694) describes why the Soviets needed an enemy to dehumanize in a frank fashion: “the ultimate purpose of dehumanizing the enemy was to communicate that what people were rioting against was not a person, but an idea.”

Chapter 9

Each strike of a hammer is a strike against the enemy! poster analysis



Figure 9-1: Deni poster

Figure 9-1 is a poster primarily known as *Each strike of a hammer is a strike against the enemy!* done by artist Viktor Deni, another Litizdat publishing house artist like Moor, albeit one with not as much notoriety. Together, Deni and Moor are considered the “two greatest masters of Soviet satire” during their respective time period (Bonnell, 1999, p. 203). It was these two Litizdat artists that introduced satirical cartoons found in political journals and fused them with the lubok style that was gaining traction in propaganda posters at the time (Dobrenko, 2009). Unlike Moor however, Deni did not portray characters in his poster art as only a villain or an enemy. Deni intended to humiliate his enemies with the use of satire (Dobrenko, 2009).

In following with post-Russian Civil War trends, individuals in posters (be they heroes or enemies) were given distinctive visual markers (Bonnell, 1999). Figure 9-1 features a silhouetted image of a worker striking an anvil that sprays bombs and bullets toward a cartoon image of Adolf Hitler. The bullets and bombs threw the cartoon Hitler off of the anvil and backward,

seemingly also throwing off a bloody axe he was using while he makes a face of exclamation as if he was letting out a howl.

Figure 9-1 was designed in 1941. However, two versions with the exact same poster have two different sets of verbiage. Also, interestingly enough, Deni has an exact same conceptual image (a worker spraying bullets at an enemy by hitting an anvil) in another poster primarily known as *Every Blow of the Hammer is a Blow Against the Enemy!* (1920), except the enemy in that version is a Polish tsar general and not cartoon Hitler (who had not even built the Nazi Party yet). There was a Polish/Soviet War from 1919-1921 that perhaps influenced it. That Deni recycled this imagery is an interesting take on an idea meant to show the fortitude of the Soviets against their invaders, whoever that may be. Although there are discrepancies in poster names, the date of 1941 is consistent. For this study, the example shown will serve the basis of the analysis.

AESTHETICS: USE of OVERALL DARKNESS/LIGHT COLORS and SHADE

The worker representation in Figure 9-1 is represented in the color red, the same color of the Russian slogan and the bullets and bombs that appear to be flying off of his anvil. As discussed previously, red has a significance not only in Soviet Russia but in political movements around the world. Its use here aligns with these representations in that it is meant to identify who is Soviet, and reinforce the color's meaning of revolution. The red in Figure 9-1 extends beyond just the image of the worker, to also apply to the Soviet bullets and bombs the workers is forging. If the call of the poster is to "strike against the enemy" one can infer that the bullets and bombs are red to signify that the Soviet Union is what will attack Hitler in order to cause his downfall.

So as to not identify closely with Soviet red, the cartoon Hitler does appear to have a red belt, with red dripping from an axe he was presumably holding, and red at the bottom of his boots. However, this is an off red, closer to maroon. That Deni felt it necessary to use an additional hue of red might just be an artist choice or to accent the blood Hitler has split. He might not have wanted this red to interfere with the representation of Soviet red.

AESTHETICS: SIGNIFICANCE (IF ANY) of CHOSEN TYPOGRAPHY

Zhurnalnaya roublennaya is the chosen font for this image although it has more of an “industrial” look than the typography in Figure 9-1, an actual common occurrence for that typeface because the letters would contour and become poor quality in the typesetting process (Sakk, 2012).

AESTHETICS: CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE of POSSIBLE SYMBOLS (INCLUDING IMAGES and WORDS)

Use of symbols in political posters is done to simplify messages (Seidman, 2008). As just discussed, the anvil and the hammer are significant images of Russian capabilities and also symbols associated with workers. Through his work on an anvil one can decipher that this worker is a blacksmith, which for a time period, was the quintessential representation of a Soviet worker used in posters. The worker is also depicted in the act of using the hammer, and is wearing a cap similar to the newsboy seen in Figure 9-1. As mentioned previously, in Russia’s First Five Year Plan, an emphasis was given to representing Soviets like this, as Lenin’s vision was to move Soviet economy away from agriculture and more to industrialization.

The cartoon Hitler has a lot of symbolism on his person with the swastika on his belt and the small moustache under his nose to aid in identifying him. He also has a knife tucked into his belt and an axe with blood on it alluding to him being an aggressor. The blood specifically has meant that he has attacked someone, maybe even murdered them. It helped in showing that he was bloodthirsty, a common tactic in posters that featured Hitler (Vallée, 2012). It also seems as if he is holding some type of club. It does not take a lot of literacy for one to infer who this is and what is implied about their capabilities. Overall, however, his cartoonish face and stature was designed by Deni as a way to ridicule him.

The Soviet worker is attacking cartoon Hitler with bullets (which are often forged by blacksmiths) but also with bombs. For a bomb (a more destructive weapon) to go alongside much smaller bullets might be an intentional way to go beyond just attacking a small representation of Hitler. Bombs are most often used to attack large areas, a tool for war. The appearance of bombs here might mean that larger military might is needed to overthrow him, both respecting in a way his power, but also empowering Soviets, because they are capable of creating and using these weapons.

If you recall, Figure 9-1 is a replica of one of Deni's earlier pieces with a very similar name, only the style and the depicted enemy are different. Deni's first poster also was using the image of a worker with a hammer against an anvil, there was a cartoon enemy, and there were bullets flying toward that enemy. By 1920, the blacksmith representation for a worker was established, so it is interesting but probably deliberate that Deni continued to use this representation in his later work (Figure 9-1). The recycling of symbols and iconography might also be just an attempt to stick with the familiar, if his viewers were already familiar with this

type of symbol use. The 20 years that separate these posters might make it unlikely that somebody might recognize its reuse, but the standard had been set by other artists as well.

CONTENT: ANALYSIS OF WORDING

According to the Google Translate app, the prominent red writing at the top of the poster is saying “Every beat of the hammer is a beat...” while the smaller, exclamatory looking writing is saying “...against the enemy!” This is a call for unity, that everything one can do will count against the enemy. Hammers and anvils are used by blacksmiths to forge metals, and the representation of the bullets and the bombs implies that this is what the worker is creating. By implying unity with such an image, Deni is saying that if Soviet workers unite, everything they make or forge will count against their adversary.

If one notices, the phrase “Every beat of the hammer is a beat...” is in Soviet red while “...against the enemy!” is in black. As mentioned previously, black is used as the color of evil, so Deni might have been purposeful in its use here, to connect it specifically with cartoon Hitler. This phrase is also written in italics to be illustrative of action, be it cartoon Hitler falling or the striking of the anvil and action of the weapons hitting him. “Every beat of the hammer is a beat...” is in Soviet red because that is the message intended or that called out to the Soviet audience of this poster specifically.

It is interesting to focus on hammers, anvils and workers with the statements in this poster. They seem to be very specific to what a blacksmith/worker can do but do not make mention of anything a soldier/military person can do. This poster might have been specific to Soviet workers in making them a part of the war effort; even though they were not fighting, they

were contributing. This poster might have been used to motivate them to work harder as their contributions in shops and work stations mattered just as much as that on the battlefield.

CONTENT: REPRESENTATIONS of THE HERO/PROTAGONIST

Figure 9-1 is significant when discussing the history of Soviet propaganda posters because it's use of both blacksmith and silhouette techniques references two trends in an era that aimed to have on archetype of a worker. As discussed earlier, the blacksmith was a common representation for workers in Soviet posters (Bonnell, 1999). To create the hero blacksmith, Soviet artists borrowed imagery from icons recognizable outside Soviet posters (Bonnell, 1999). The images derive from Greek god Hephaestus (Vulcan with the Romans) who appeared with a hammer in hand (Bonnell, 1999). The figure is also wielding a hammer which according to Bonnell (1999) was common in traditional Russian armorial art. The heroic blacksmith image showed in posters either made the blacksmith a quiet, dignified worker, or one engaged in the physical act of battling an enemy, which he is doing in Figure 9-1 (Bonnell, 1999). He often held his hammer on his right hand, although it is not quite clear as to why. Figure 9-1 keeps with this tradition as it is his right hand that we see. At the time Figure 9-1 was created, the image of the silhouette was still becoming the new trend. By 1932, however, the image of the blacksmith in posters became "bourgeois" and a "poster cliché" (Bonnell, 1999, p. 34). It was a bit unconventional for Deni to have continued using a blacksmith image even when the trend had passed.

In Figure 9-1, the worker is presented in silhouette with no identification markers and a face that bares no significant expressions. The silhouette became a new trend after artists moved to a new artistic period of emphasizing the "ordinary man" and instead showed a vague

representation of a man with no added details (Bonnell, 1999, p. 35). Bonnell (1999) writes about how this move was to move away from the proletariat to a Soviet depiction of a man. Eventually, Soviet artists would give more expression and the representation of feelings to workers (Bonnell, 1999). However, this emphasis was not fully embraced as some critics called them “mechanized dolls” which actually led to trends moving away from the use of silhouettes by the mid 1930s (Bonnell, 1999, p. 35). It was after this trend when Soviet workers in posters began to get more identification nuances that made them specific metalworkers, construction workers, etc. (Bonnell, 1999).

Aside from their new representation for workers, there was also an added stressing on the depiction of motion which was part of the new visual language that emerged during the First Five Year Plan (Bonnell, 1999). This visual language was part of a “Stalinist semiotic system” (Bonnell, 1999, p. 42). Bonnell (1999) even goes as far as to say that it was an expectation of artists. Motion was stressed so as to make proletariats appear capable of great acts.

The blacksmith worker in Figure 9-1 is also male which was quite common until female blacksmiths made an appearance in posters in the 1920s (Bonnell, 1999). The need for these gender markings were to indicate male domination (Bonnell, 1999). Women were often portrayed subordinate to men. That Deni chose to represent a male worker might just be an attempt to focus the intent of the poster on the exercise of military might when, on average it was men who fought on the front lanes and typically worked as blacksmiths. If Deni wanted to focus on women’s roles and abilities, he might have made this worker female. However, as Bonnell (1999, p.13) wrote, “the depiction of a woman blacksmith...must have struck contemporaries as exceedingly odd” as it was not a norm that the average viewer could relate to.

CONTENT: REPRESENTATIONS of AN ENEMY

A key difference in how Deni and Moor represented enemies is that Moor's enemies were meant to disgust you, and Deni's were meant to make you laugh (Bonnell, 1999). The enemy in Figure 9-1 is a caricature of Adolf Hitler. Hitler was one of many external enemies that were seen in Soviet propaganda posters (Bonnell, 1999). He also made an appearance in American posters. For the USSR, Hitler's invasion made him a prime target for ridicule. As discussed earlier, Deni's enemies were often depicted in a humiliating fashion, depicted as weak through either their facial expression or their body size (Dobrenko, 2009). Cartoons were used in posters to be a departure from realism, providing almost a sense of pleasure in fiction (Vallée, 2012). Here, Hitler is represented in a cartoonish way, not someone to be perceived a threat or feared. He is small, almost childlike, a belittling technique seen in many posters (Vallée, 2012). By making him small, Deni is also in turn making the worker larger and more imposing over him. Hitler seems beatable, and perhaps no match to a Soviet worker.

Belittling Hitler in posters was fairly common where he often appears clown-like in Soviet, British and American works (Vallée, 2012). Also common were images of him being "metaphorically destroyed," literally having an act of violence thrust upon him (Vallée, 2012). In Figure 9-1 Hitler is dehumanized, he is easy prey due to his small cartoonish appearance against Soviet might and weaponry. That he is toppling over from the impact of the bombs and bullets might hint at the real-life goal to topple him from his role in Germany. That he carries an axe with blood might mean to serve as a reminder to Soviet viewers of the poster, of his war crimes and whose blood would be on the axe if he is an instigator. He is a threat to take seriously, even if viewers might laugh at his appearance and folly.

Deni's approach to Hitler is an interesting one if one keeps in mind what crimes and atrocities he was committing and capable of. His approach to belittle and humiliate him was shared by artists all over the world. This approach was to be a morale-booster for what was a really ugly war. It might even be a little risky for those who fought, but ultimately the message was there for those who may not see Hitler's military power with their own eyes, to tell them that he is not worthy of their fear.

EMOTIONS: ANALYSIS OF EMOTIONS THE CONTENT CREATOR MIGHT HAVE TRIED TO CONVEY

As discussed, Deni's depiction of a cartoon Hitler is meant to incite emotions, but not one of anger, defiance or fear. In Figure 9-1, Hitler has an image of pain or surprise on his cartoon face. With such an expression, one can almost feel a kind of pity toward his representation, as well as perhaps laughing at such a "puny" enemy. The action shot of the hammer against the anvil does more to convey emotion than the worker/blacksmith's expressionless face: it shows that a mighty strike is able to vanquish an adversary. Such a projection can fill a Soviet viewer with a sense of strength, capability and pride in their abilities to destroy Hitler.

The act of violence Hitler is experiencing (with the spray of bullets and bombs) is also meant to incite emotions, particularly because a real-life war was being fought against him. People were losing loved ones against this man and the forces he led. A viewer can feel a sense of satisfaction in seeing him in pain, or a desire to continue to see him suffer even more. With his small, cartoonish body he almost seems vulnerable. Yet the action against him is where someone might live vicariously through the silhouetted, red blacksmith—to be armed with the will to seek one's own revenge. If they worked hard, they could almost be on the battlefield themselves.

The image of the worker is not particularly pridedeworthy as you cannot see his face and he is almost anonymous through the silhouette. Nonetheless the Soviet red silhouette, the Russian wording and the action of hammering the anvil are almost to remind Soviet workers of their own power and capabilities. There were part of the large-scale arms race and important for victory. This balances with the other emotion, almost of humor but a continued sense of power and capability, with the falling down of a cartoon Hitler. Although a bit faceless, this worker is confident; he does not appear to draw back from Hitler and he stands tall.

The focus of Figure 9-1 is not on patriotism or making a negative statement on the enemy, although they can be emotional results. The focus, main intent of the poster, as concluded from the slogan and image of the protagonist, is on the war effort. There are no blatant symbols or imagery markers to mean Soviet pride is the main intent, nor is the focus on a cartoon Hitler. If so, either of those things would be bigger and more prominent. The focus is on the worker and how his contributions lead to results. Workers needed to contribute, but also feel themselves capable should they be needed on the military front.

POSSIBLE VISUAL ARGUMENTS

Cartoon Hitler is depicted in an oafish way, not meant to incite fear or hatred which are powerful emotions to have to urge people to act against a violent foe. That Deni uses humor in a depiction of Hitler in a funny way is unique, especially since he is uses violence alongside it. According to Vallée (2012), British representation of Hitler differed from American and Soviet ones. British cartoon Hitler was used to make a statement, to be a more realistic portrayal. American cartoon Hitler was drawn in a cartoonish, demeaning way but he incited violent acts against him which the British versions did not do. It makes some sense for the British to take this

view, because Hitler was bombing their country, and for the Americans who did not have war on the home front to take another. It would appear insensitive for a British representation to try to depict humor when Hitler was so close to the country and actively attacking it. As for the Soviets, who did fight and suffered many losses against the Nazis, a cartoon Hitler might have been a pre-viewing for those who were not yet there.

Vallée (2012) also speculates that it might depend on what timeframe of the war is when the poster was created. A 1941 poster would be right at the time the Germans started to invade Russia and before the Battle of Stalingrad. The Soviets could hate Hitler for his assault but had not felt the high number of casualties that would come later as a result. A humorous take on him after that battle probably would not have been seen positively.

As Jowett and O'Donnell (2019, p. 220) wrote, “the importance of collectivism over the individual” is a communist propaganda staple. That Deni chose one silhouetted worker image, instead of an image of many, to fight against Hitler might have been mere designer choice and a lack of room. Or it, more than likely, was meant to make a viewer of the poster feel like they could be this worker, despite Soviet emphasis on the many instead of the few.

This poster was designed for the civilian population, so they can feel how vital they were to acquire victory, and that their contributions mattered. As Chambers (1983) points out, these kinds of posters have to remain positive. They had to motivate civilian metalworkers to continue to produce war material. Deni created the belief that they were capable of creating big things using humor.

Chapter 10

Analysis of two posters



Figure 10-1: Moor poster



Figure 10-2: Deni poster

Litizdat produced a high volume of work from the “two greatest masters of Soviet satire” (Bonnell, 1999, p. 203). Figure 10-1 and Figure 10-2 were designed around the same timeframe although each had different interpretations of enemies and Soviets.

In following with post-Russian Civil War trends, individuals in posters (be they heroes or enemies) were given distinctive visual markers (Bonnell, 1999). Figure 10-2 features a silhouetted image of a worker striking an anvil that sprays bombs and bullets toward a cartoon image of Adolf Hitler. Deni’s worker and Hitler are in the act of having a confrontation, much like Moor’s worker is also being confronted. With a focus on confrontation and Soviet response it does not take much to realize what the intention behind both these figures’ creation is: to show Soviet workers what is possible, and that there was a formidable foe they would have to face, although neither poster outlines specifically how these enemies might affect the day-to-day lives of Soviets. It was in the repeated viewing of these kinds of images that viewers might walk away feeling mobilized to fight against these foes.

AESTHETICS

According to Bonnell (1999), color symbolism is used to convey meaning in Soviet propaganda posters. Figure 10-1 is a simple poster featuring only three colors, a dark black color, white and red. The Russian slogans at the top of both sides of this lithograph are also written in this prominent shade of red. Red has had much symbolism throughout the ages and has become specifically synonymous with communism. The red in Figure 10-2 extends beyond just the image of the worker, to also apply to the Soviet bullets and bombs the workers is forging. Its use here aligns with these representations in that it is meant to identify who is Soviet, and reinforce the color's meaning of revolution.

Both figures also make some use of the color black, a color that could have been chosen due to its severity and seriousness to underscore the confrontational situation between the respective protagonist and enemy figures. Black could be used as a basic color, since it is commonly used to complete outlines in drawing and is used for shading and shadow elements. However, black is a color used to denote evil (Dobrenko, 2009). It could be no accident that it is used in both figures for the basic coloring or outlining of enemies in all instances.

A slightly different shade of red (almost like a maroon) is used as an accent color with small appearances in both figures. In Figure 10-1, it is seen in the face of the small bearded opponent raising his arm toward the worker, and the boot and arm of the small gestapo figure. In Figure 10-2, the cartoon Hitler does appear to have this same maroon-looking red in his belt, with the same red dripping from an axe he was holding, and the red at the bottom of his boots. For Moor and Deni, use of this additional hue of red might just be an artist choice or accent color. Its use meant to not interfere with the representation of Soviet red.

When analyzing typography, the only thing that can be said is that both figures use an original Soviet font.

Use of symbols in political posters is done to simplify messages (Seidman, 2008). Figure 10-1 is rife with symbols used to help identify all of the characters and give further impact to an overall message. All of the Soviet enemies use symbols as a way to help identify who they are, and symbols are also used in the same way to identify the worker/protagonist. Overall there are so many enemy characters to symbolize fascism and capitalism. That Moor recycled his symbolic worker and Deni recycled his entire poster shows how during this timeframe, symbols were almost used as a form of branding or marketing: to see the same imagery repeatedly helps reinforce it.

The anvil and the hammer are an example of repeated symbolism in these posters and others at the time, symbols that were significant reoccurring images in Communist Russia. This is for the same “branded” reinforcement intent discussed earlier in the memes, but also used for simple identification of a worker figure. Like in Figure 10-1, Figure 10-2’s worker is identified with the use of his cap and red coloring. It is not wholly possible to know what kind of worker the one in Figure 10-1 is, but in Figure 10-2 it was deliberate to use the anvil and identify this worker as an industrialized one.

Like in Figure 10-1, Figure 10-2 also heavily relies on symbols to help identify enemies in addition to protagonists. The cartoon Hitler has a swastika on his belt and a small moustache. In keeping with past discussions on literacy, one can infer that this heavy reliance on symbolism and identification is meant for anyone regardless of literate levels to understand who these characters are. This heavy reliance goes beyond just the individuals since bullets, bombs and facial expressions work in the same way to help someone know what story the poster is telling.

Like Moor's recycling of symbolism, Deni reused an entire former poster he created to tell a new message. Both Moor and Deni know symbols in Soviet Russia worked as a form of branding, and repeated use would help viewers remain familiar with what story the symbols are telling.

CONTENT

As is to be expected, both figures feature slogans written in Russian, with the exception of the "Worker of the world, unite!" statement which is written in English in Figure 10-1. The English phrase in Figure 10-1 is interesting as it was unorthodox among Soviet posters to feature writing in English. This would imply that the poster is not just meant for Russian audiences, perhaps intended to serve for communist propaganda of a worldwide scope. With the help of Google Translate, we know that the slogans in both figures use verbiage that is expected of Soviet messaging, that use words like "class" or "proletariats" as well as a call for action and unity as seen in Figure 10-2. The phrase in Figure 10-2 is also written in italics to be illustrative of action.

The only other writing in either of these figures are the initials "C. Д." found in Figure 10-1 likely used to identify the Social Democratic Party of Germany character. Limiting verbiage to the slogans gives power to what they are saying. Limited wording is also important to reach maximum impact to a primarily illiterate populace as described earlier.

In both figures, the worker illustration is shown anonymously. They are both men, but he is not given *too* many identifying symbols or characteristics—no Soviet insignia or uniform other than red pendants or similar hats. This is a plain-folks device—an attempt to gain confidence by appearing to be just like the viewer (Dobrenko, 2009).

Perspectival distortion was used in both figures to give the Russian workers an almost exaggerated status in comparison to that of the enemy. Although both figures came from the same publishing house, they do use different techniques in their protagonists that were common when each respective artist created them. Figure 10-1 has a face, an integral part of the story that poster is telling. Figure 10-2 has none with an entire focus on what the worker is doing, not who he is or what he might feel. While that may imply Figure 10-2 does not use emotion, it is because the focus of the poster is instead on *action* and the effect it has on the enemy, whereas Figure 10-1 is more static.

In their own efforts to manipulate fellow Russians, the Bolsheviks introduced enemies to posters: the capitalist, the tsar, the monarchist, the fascist or the Menshevik (Bonnell, 1999). According to Bonnell (1999), Moor's enemy depictions were meant to incite disgust, whereas Deni used humor to make fun of them. These enemies were depicted as threats with aims of destroying the Soviet Union (Bonnell, 1999). While many depictions gave them sub-human qualities, in both Figure 10-1 and Figure 10-2 the enemy characters still appear human and recognizable, although unlikeable. Perspectival distortion is apparent in both instances with the exception of the large top-hat wearing man who is the same size as the worker image. This is an interesting decision by Moor. Deni's Hitler is definitely smaller and weaker than the Figure 10-2 hero.

In Figure 10-2 there is an immediate action being taken against the enemy, not like in Figure 10-1 where we are still in the act of only *confronting* him. To recap, it was profoundly common for posters around this time to illustrate a virtual destruction of Hitler. While in Figure 10-2 Hitler is dehumanized, the same cannot be said of Figure 10-1 where the figures do not appear particularly belittled as much as they appear relatively normal and realistic. They do

appear to incite fear or anger yet the focus of Figure 10-1 is more on the ability of the worker to stand up to the sheer amount and the diversity of enemies who are challenging him. By making Hitler appear in an amusing, cartoonish fashion Deni is taking a bit of risk differently than dehumanizing: he could downplay his significance which has a risk for those who feel the effects of his military maneuvers and violence.

EMOTIONS: ANALYSIS OF EMOTIONS THE CONTENT CREATOR MIGHT HAVE TRIED TO CONVEY

The facial expressions and posturing of the characters in both figures are as big an influence on overall emotion conveyed as anything else. The worker and the top hat-wearing capitalist/fascist are taking up as much room in Figure 10-1 as one another. They are leaning into each other, being hostile. That there is only one hero worker represented here is meant to give Soviet workers viewing the poster, a sense of brotherhood and feelings of pride or strength in this worker's ability to not flinch in a situation where he has five people antagonizing him, even one pointing a gun. This worker exhibits no fear. The decision to show someone standing up to various exhibits of adversity was deliberate.

The sense of pride in the worker in Figure 10-1, also extends to what is occurring in Figure 10-2. The main message here is that the act itself (of hammering an anvil of bullets and bombs against an enemy) can successfully topple an enemy, an indication that anyone can contribute and succeed toward the cause of eradicating their threat. Such a projection can fill a Soviet viewer with a sense of pride in their capability to destroy Hitler. Figure 10-2 goes beyond Figure 10-1 because it shows you *how* an enemy can be defeated, it visualizes it for viewers, giving them the satisfaction of seeing him in pain, or a desire to continue to see him suffer even

more. Figure 10-2 is about capability specifically, but both figures are about enabling pride and confidence in Soviets, that they are more than capable to stand up to or vanquish their enemies.

POSSIBLE VISUAL ARGUMENTS

With such a heavy focus on enemies and heroes, both figures are not just telling Russian consumers of these posters that they are capable of fighting back, they are laying down the idea that they have someone to fight against in the first place. These posters are tools of the state to tell the people that they have an enemy, they are all part of a larger movement against that enemy, and that they can individually contribute to win against them. This is true if you look at individual hero/protagonists, but Moor and Deni also paid significant time and care to depictions of enemies *in relation to* their hero/protagonists. Perspectival distortion plays a huge role in both these figures for what Bonnell (1999, p. 195) describes as when “a giant enemy demanded a giant hero.”

The Soviets gave Russians something to hate as an act of manipulation. The very idea of their being a “we” or state complete with distinctive colors and logos is what governments do to retain a sense of power. It also goes with communist doctrine about an established “we” instead of individualism. As Jowett & O'Donnell (2019, p. 220) wrote, “the importance of collectivism over the individual” is a communist propaganda staple.

To recap, here are the similarities between Figure 10-1 and Figure 10-2, the poster figures:

Table 10-1 Poster Figure Commonalities

| | |
|---|--|
| Posters were meant to mobilize | Heroes are the same (Soviet workers) |
| Show what “could be” | Color symbolism is significant |
| Create/reinforce images of significance | Use simple slogans, rely more on images than words |
| Enemy not named, but identified through symbols | Authors were known |

Chapter 11

Findings: Meme & Poster Comparisons

At first glance 21st century internet memes and World War II-era Soviet propaganda posters appear light years apart from each other. With an almost 100-year difference in between both kinds of medium, one cannot deny that they are very different. However, as assessed in this paper, they share more in common than just their distinctive country of origin. All of these figures were created to communicate visually and to more specifically serve as tools of persuasion. The posters were created by the Soviets to manipulate and persuade their own citizenry to feel a part of one nation with one mission. The memes were created by Russians to further political divisions of a foreign citizenry that was not theirs. Posters were placed in public spaces and were mass-produced to cover large areas. Memes could be created once but easily shared on the internet, where they can be reshared and repurposed easily, spreading to a larger audience quicker. With posters there was little doubt who created them (the state), but with memes there is more secretiveness as it is often difficult to identify the original creator.

However different, they do share some similarities. In both mediums, the Russians consistently used “branded” imagery to create a sense of organization and unity, either through logos or artists who shared techniques. In both posters and memes, you often see the repurposing of images whether it would be a poster artist reusing their own creations to make variants of the same image or symbols, or you see meme creators using an older photograph with a new caption to give it new meaning.

AESTHETICS: USE of OVERALL DARKNESS/LIGHT COLORS and SHADE

All of these figures center around the sense of a duality, an “us” versus a “them” approach which all artists used to a certain extent. Both memes use different shades of colors to emphasize a contrast, but they also make design choices (like the black backdrop in the caption of the Army of Jesus meme) to make their posters aesthetically pleasing. The IRA knew how to make memes look good in addition to carrying their intended messages.

These contrasts could be used to exaggerate differences, a sign of the intent behind the memes (to *divide* American interest groups). Such contrasts in shading emphasize that there are *two* distinct sides. It might appear difficult to say definitively that this was the IRA’s intent, but it is noticeable.

Color symbolism had significant meaning in Soviet propaganda posters, although it was used less blatantly (if at all) in memes. Posters featured in this study only used two or three colors, with the unmistakable Russian red accented in both. Color played less of a role in memes with no Soviet red present (probably a purposeful decision since the USSR fell apart in 1989 but also because the IRA was trying to mask their involvement).

AESTHETICS: SIGNIFICANCE (IF ANY) of CHOSEN TYPOGRAPHY

Both memes and posters used sans serif fonts—fonts commonly seen as easier to read than serif fonts, but also seen as less formal. The posters appear to be using original Soviet fonts, typefaces that would become obsolete around the time of the fall of the Soviet Union itself (Sakk, 2012).

AESTHETICS: CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE of POSSIBLE SYMBOLS (INCLUDING IMAGES and WORDS)

As mentioned, symbolism is a major element found in all four figures. The Blacktivist meme and the Army of Jesus meme share symbols of clenched, raised fists. Both memes feature watermark logos. The Army of Jesus meme and the Moor poster share religious symbols. Often, symbols in all four figures were used to create the idea of a “brand.” However, they were often used to help identify individuals in each individual medium, whether it be the black beret of the Panthers or the swastika of fascist Nazis. Intriguingly if one notices, symbols play a bigger role in helping identify both hero/protagonists in the memes, and enemies in the posters (with the exception of the Blacktivist meme that has no enemy illustration). This might be because the IRA-created social media accounts were self-identifying as serving niche groups—they already knew who was viewing them, so they placed emphasis on these identities to create more emotional pull. For the posters, having them placed in the country where their respective audience already was made it less about identity and more about the capabilities of that united Soviet identity.

Certain symbols presented in these posters were recycled images meant for a greater sense of identity, such as the anvil being repeatedly seen in Soviet posters and hammers being a part of the Soviet emblem and logo. The memes reuse or repurpose images that had significance to their target groups, whereas the Soviet posters focused on *creating* significance in imagery *for* those target groups. Moor, Deni, and other designers created the image of the anvil, hammer-wielding worker for Russians to look up to. They created the hammer and sickle emblem that would be synonymous with communism. The gestapo uniform and swastikas seen in the Moor

and Deni posters work the same way. These are symbols not just used for identification but symbols that have to do with larger, state decisions, and marketing.

Some propaganda posters from World War II feature the clenched, raised fist (like the Moor poster does), so it is a long-standing symbol that would be somewhat familiar to the IRA to reuse. If you look at symbol use overall, that the fist was sometimes combined with the hammer and sickle of the Soviet Union as a form of communist symbolism throughout history is interesting but could just be coincidence, since the IRA might have used it in the Blacktivist meme because it has become common in the United States to see it as a Black Power symbol in the last few decades (Cushing, 2011). Other symbols seen in these figures, like Christ and pro-religion symbolism used minimally in the Army of Jesus meme and the Moor poster, have no major purpose in the overall persuasive intent of the respective figures' message as much as, once again, only serving as a means to help identify those figures.

CONTENT: ANALYSIS OF WORDING

The posters rely on simple slogans as their primary wording, perhaps relying more on the story told through images instead of wording. In complete contrast, both memes rely more on wording to tell or exaggerate the story told by the image, the Army of Jesus meme even relying on the wording outside of the meme and on the ad itself to tell their story. However, neither meme uses proper English grammar.

All figures however use “buzzwords” that would have meaning to the targeted audience of that figure, whether it be the “class” or “proletariats” words in the posters, or the “KKK” and “godly morals” of the memes. Like often found in advertising, a set of words in messaging is used to gain and maintain attention from those who find meaning in their usage.

CONTENT: REPRESENTATIONS of THE HERO/PROTAGONIST

The memes themselves do not share a major similarity when it comes to representations of their respective hero/protagonists. However, the posters definitely do with both posters clearly identifying their heroes as Soviet workers with a distinctive hat as common identification.

Anonymity did play a major role for hero/protagonists in the Blacktivist meme and the Deni poster. Viewers of these images would then be able to picture themselves as fitting into these roles, being able to *identify* with the hero/protagonists and imagine themselves as being in the image—the plain-folks device.

The Army of Jesus meme and the Moor poster do not present their hero as necessarily relatable but admirable, as a symbol of reverence (Christ) in the Army of Jesus meme, and the defiant, newsboy-wearing worker in the Moor poster. Both offer their viewers an emotional pull and desire to see them succeed. Both heroes are also in a confrontation with someone else. Perspectival distortion plays a role with workers in both posters, however, Christ and Satan in the Army of Jesus meme appear the same size. All hero/protagonists in these four figures also appear static with the exception of the Deni poster, which is the only one actively trying to do something against his enemy.

CONTENT: REPRESENTATIONS of AN ENEMY

All figures have a demonstrative enemy that the hero/protagonist is up against, characters that also serve as enemies to the target audience. The only exception is the Blacktivist meme, whose enemy appears in name only. Both memes actually use the name, whereas neither of the posters do. One could say that this matters because of who the intended targets were, but also

how each medium is used. As examined above, the memes relied on wording, whereas the posters were more about symbolism and the image itself.

The goal with memes is for them to go viral and spread beyond where they were initially uploaded by the IRA. The KKK and Satan are well-known malevolent figures in the American psyche. However, the decision to not feature a hooded person in the Blacktivist meme might be to make it easier to instead focus on the emotional pull of pride with the image of the Black Panthers. The IRA may have just been using another technique here. The focus on demonizing an enemy factors more in the design of the Army of Jesus meme where they use the word Satan, an image of him, but also evoke Hillary Clinton's name in relation to him by implying that she is Satan.

The Hitler in the Deni poster is also being demonized in a way, although you can say he is more or less being looked down on. The Moor poster is similar to the Army of Jesus meme in that it centers on the confrontation of hero and enemy. They are very familiar. The only thing slightly different is that the Moor poster enemies are plural; unlike all of the other figures, here there are *several* of them. It is likely Moor chose to do this to show how many enemies are possible against the Soviet state. While the Army of Jesus meme and the Deni poster are also making political statements, a depiction of Hitler when faced with Soviet manufactured weaponry is making a more blatant political statement because it is naming a specific enemy of the Soviet state, more so than in the more anonymous figures of the Moor poster. Satan arm wrestling Christ is not as blatant, although evoking the names of Clinton and Trump in the Army of Jesus meme makes it pretty clear what the IRA wants Army of Jesus followers to think of each politician.

EMOTIONS: ANALYSIS OF EMOTIONS THE CONTENT CREATOR MIGHT HAVE TRIED TO CONVEY

Whether repurposed or created, images, symbols, and the confrontation between a protagonist and an enemy were done with the intent of creating an emotional pull for an audience. Heroes were shown heroically or triumphantly so that viewers could identify and align themselves with their individual representations.

The Soviet posters were focused on calling out the possibility of beating and standing up to enemies, perhaps because war mobilization was integral to messaging. The memes had a different motive, they were designed and shared with the intent to further divide existing political lines. Therefore, their enemy depictions or mentions were less about mobilization by the viewers against them, but in these particular memes, they were mentioned only to further ongoing dialogues about unequal treatment or creating a further divide between groups.

With the exception of the Blacktivist meme, the other three figures suggest or show an actual action being taken against the opposing force. Emotions that are usually conveyed to incite action include anger or hate. The Blacktivist meme's emotional pull is not focused on an anger toward the KKK or the government, but more on pride for what Black Panthers from the past were able to accomplish. It does have a hint of suggesting anger, in the unequal treatment of the Panthers, but there is no included imagery to evoke action toward this source of anger. In all figures too, the emotions evoked by the images are for the intended target audience; if seen by someone else they may evoke different kinds of emotions. In fact, a different audience may not be able to visually "read" what is going on in these images, because of either never having seen that type of imagery before or having no emotional investment in the images' suggested outcome. The posters in particular were only for their intended audience, however social media

is easily reshared and these memes leaving their source pages might work to “recruit” new sympathizers or go to an unsympathetic audience, thus furthering a divide if you were sensitive to the image or not.

The Blacktivist meme and the Moor poster in particular focus on feelings of brotherhood as their imagery is about a kinship with the protagonist. The Army of Jesus meme and the Deni poster are imaginings of what could be if literal action is not taken. Both are re-imaginings of a type of war between opposing groups to evoke emotions either of anger and wanting to fight, or of how the enemy is no match for the viewer’s side. Both memes focus a lot on creating a sense of mobility, that an action must be taken, and an appearance of what is at stake, what can be lost. The Army of Jesus meme features a scene of heaven behind Christ to remind Christians of what they should aim for, and the same can be said of black pride in the Black Panthers as implied by their general appearance. These backdrops add to the emotional value of the overall image, balancing out the value beyond just the immediate image or context of the wording included in the meme or the ad.

As discussed earlier, specialized social media pages and accounts work toward making it okay for users to seek and only see the thoughts and beliefs they already believe in. If someone who had pride in being black sees or reads about the KKK they are reminded that there is division, and in the Blacktivist meme in particular they are reminded that they do not get equal treatment. The Army of Jesus meme does not quite work the same, but equating some of the basic beliefs of Christianity with the names of Trump and Clinton, can make it seem that conservatism is Christianity (good) and liberalism is Satan (evil).

POSSIBLE VISUAL ARGUMENTS

The memes make claims and show what can be lost, whereas the posters recite/show would could be. Both memes make claims that are also inaccurate (the government was not involved with the “dismantling” of the Panthers and the claim that Clinton is aligned with Satan is a bit outlandish). For someone who is consuming this kind of messaging without probably vetting it, these claims might be taken as truths. This could be pure chance based on this available sampling but might be a greater statement on how social media is used today: content can easily be sampled at a passing glance with no critical eye. The same might be said of posters, but in those instances being critical of the state you were a part of might be more dangerous. With social media use and available freedoms now, there is no excuse.

All of the images also have some kind of divide, some kind of battle going on between two groups. The intended audience of each image, is the “good side” and the other side is the “bad” one. All of the figures are telling their audience that they have a battle to fight, that they have an enemy to fight against. There is no sympathy for that opposing side. They are something to hate, to fight against, not to be rational with. The targeting was on point, making the audience part of a collective “we” instead of an individual. (Even though there might be an individual shown in the image, they are only there so viewers can relate to them.)

To recap, here are the biggest similarities or differences between the memes and poster figures:

Table 11-1 Figure Similarities/Differences Summary

| Memes | Posters | Both |
|--|--|--|
| Persuasion of another country's audiences | Persuasion of own people | Communicate visually |
| Not clear who created them | Clear who created them (the state) | Have an element of persuasion |
| Created a "branded" look through use of a logo | Created a "branded" look through repeated use of symbols | Reuse past images or reinforce past symbols |
| No color symbolism | Color symbolism important | Feature a duality, two sides |
| | Featured Soviet-created fonts | Use sans serif fonts |
| Heavily uses wording | Rely more on the image than the slogan | Used symbols to help with identification of characters |
| Designed to divide, or show what can be lost | Designed to mobilize, show what could be | Use buzzwords of significance to the targeted audience |

Chapter 12

Discussion & Conclusion

Overall, whether created by Litizdat artists or the IRA, Russian propaganda pieces from the past and the present seem to use similar elements to tell similar stories. When it comes to reviewing the design elements (as proposed in RQ1), overall the figures use a combination of both aesthetic qualities (like color, shading, and typography) and content choices to serve their persuasive purpose. All figures also incorporate wording to some degree and all use “buzzwords” that have meaning to the target audience. Posters had a bigger emphasis on images than words since, as stated much earlier in this work, illiteracy was very high in the mostly agrarian society the Bolsheviks took over after the revolutions. Memes exist in a more literate society, so memes have a greater emphasis on wording than posters did, although it is in the greater emphasis of this wording that one might be able to see that the IRA often make grammatical or cultural mistakes that should help any American decipher that the creator of the content is not American. Heavy use of symbols is also noted in all four figures to help identification or sympathy toward one or more characters. Their main differentiators are how they were used. When it comes to overall darkness/light colors and shade, color played a bigger role in posters than they did in memes. All figures used sans serif fonts. Symbols in all figures can be understood if spoken to a shared, cultural language.

The visual arguments examined throughout this work help answer RQ2, which explores the figures and how they make illustrative representations of divisions, contrasts, enemies, and hero/protagonists. The figures use design elements to help or further emphasize these arguments; the biggest visual argument made in all figures is that there is a duality, an “us” versus “them.” The “us” is the viewer who is usually referred to as the side of being “good” and the “them” are

sources of evil and hate. Posters and memes seem to share these visual arguments, although if one remembers how each medium was used during their respective time period, one should consider whether the figure was created by the artist for fellow countrymen, or whether the figure was created by an outside force to change the intended audience in another one. It is possible these are trends as Bonnell (1999) described of “a clear distinction between binary opposites” for Bolshevik ideology to flourish according to the First Five Year Plan. It would make sense for a regime that was starting up to take this approach when they wanted to take over a country and have the populace on their side. This approach might still be relevant in today’s political atmosphere where divisions seem to be an area available for exploitation.

RQ3 is answered through the review of emotional appeals when the figures targeted those with a shared “cultural language” by creating sympathy for hero/protagonists. All four figures create a sense of fear, anger, or confidence in combating an enemy. They often show “what could be” while tugging at idealism with either a positive outlook of protecting an image they revere or a negative outlook of demonizing an enemy to show what can happen if the protagonist loses against them. All figures also use emotions to evoke feelings of anger, fear, pride to further their respective visual arguments.

Design elements and emotions are both needed to further visual arguments made by the creator of these figures. All four figures provide “visual thickness” with substantial semiotics and opportunities to analyze the various elements of aesthetics or content references for analysis in order to make this happen. In both the memes and posters, the message was furthered because the creator targeted those who would speak the same cultural language as the intended medium. The creator ensured they would be able to read the figures, otherwise there would be no success

in these images being created. In other words, it is not enough to just create these images, their success as persuasive devices comes in how well targeted they are.

There are similarities between the memes and posters selected for this study, but the statement that all memes are one way or all posters are another is a bit broad. The Army of Jesus meme and the Moor poster are very similar to each other in that they put this battle between two opposing forces against each other front and center. The Blacktivist meme differs from all the other figures in that it exclusively focuses on creating a sense of pride with no visual depiction of an enemy at all. The Deni poster differs from the others in that it uses humor to view their enemy as insignificant.

Memes are the newer of the two mediums, and as demonstrated in this work, have proven to be just as powerful as posters used for the Soviet state to influence Russian citizenry to feel a kinship with the new onset of communism, move into a more industrialized state, and mobilize against new enemies with the beginning of World War II. Although propaganda posters were recognized as being persuasive tools after World War II, this study shows how visual arguments and imagery continues to be a major tool for persuasion even today. While some societies might still use posters, one cannot rule out the importance of memes. The biggest way to reach people has moved to the internet, particularly on social media where images are the major way to share content on platforms like Instagram and Facebook.

This study is limited as it samples only four figures in a vast sampling available of Soviet posters, and in a large sampling available of IRA-created memes. In fact, there is evidence that despite the IRA being outed, there are still nefarious social media accounts created by the IRA. Linvill and Warren (2019) present information that the IRA is still creating fake accounts to grow audiences and spread information that can lead to “division, distrust, and doubt.” As they

describe it, these social media accounts serve as “trojan horses” to befriend and gain the trust of audiences – a tactic that only works because they have that audience well-studied, knowing how to “harness biases” and push pressure points.

Linville and Warren (2019) accredit the IRA’s tactics as “spin” which they attribute to public relations and marketing. The Public Relations Society of America and other public relations organizations do not wish to be associated with the traditional concept of “spin” as it goes against the Code of Ethics for public relations practices. However, as Linville and Warren (2019) describe, and as can be concluded from this study, the IRA do have a general understanding of marketing tactics and more specifically, the marketing of emotions. Emotions drive “political warfare” (Linville & Warren, 2019) as also evidenced in the review of emotional appeals of Soviet posters in this paper.

Whether using fake accounts or posters, the IRA is looking out for Russian interests. Linville and Warren (2019) argue that their main intentions are to polarize candidates, and attack moderate politics. However, they do not just act on one political side—they attack both, creating fake messaging that influences both left and right politics.

This study hopefully helped illustrate the importance of questioning what you read online. Linville and Warren (2019) state that the IRA generated more social content in 2017 than they did before the 2016 presidential election, meaning that the need to be subjective of everything you see (even if it appears as a “harmless” meme) continues and will continue to be important for anyone using the internet. More and more people are becoming aware that Russian bots exist but still continue to share content that appears in newsfeeds without questioning the source. Most social media newsfeeds are also influenced by algorithms that make users continually see what they interact with. Such a practice only makes it more likely that we see

IRA-created memes if we interact with them, making it more and more likely that we are swayed by the persuasive messaging they desire us to see.

Even after propaganda posters were analyzed post-war in the 1950s and 1960s, even when it was proven that argumentation can be a visual format and imagery can be used to be persuasive, we still believe what we see and read online. The citizenry falls for fake social posts and spam email although we know not to trust robo phone calls or believe spam email. We have been trained in these other media to some extent, but social media is still relatively new and there is more training of the populace needed to tell the difference between truth and fiction. Future research might be worthwhile to look into why people believe what they read online and why it is harder to decipher truth from fiction online.

There are questions also if this kind of persuasive illustrations are exclusive to those created by Russian organizations either from the past or the present, or if these are larger best practices for memes that work in general. Could there be other nefarious organizations that are using memes to cause divisions or influence the greater populace? Would they use different techniques? This would be an interesting study. As would looking into how the American military established the Meme Control Center (discussed earlier in this work) to combat such influences.

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