

# Study on the Visual Design Elements of Election Posters -Focused on a Specific Candidate's Poster from the Mayor of Seoul Election 2018-

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## 선거공약 포스터의 시각적 디자인 요소 연구 -2018 서울시장선거의 특정후보 포스터 중심으로-

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**Abstract** This study analyzes the visual design elements in election posters and the influence they have. Focused on the Mayor of Seoul election in 2018, this research aims to find out the influence of visual elements on the possible cause of vandalisms of election posters. As a research method, the researcher analyzed the role of election posters and investigated examples of election poster vandalisms in Korea. In addition, the researcher conducted eight in-depth interviews about the positive and negative opinions about the visual elements of a specific candidate's election poster from the Mayor of Seoul election. As a result, there are two findings. First, the visual design elements did not influence the provocation of vandalism. Second, the content of the political slogan had the most negative influence. This study is significant because it examines the influence of visual design elements on the election campaign posters. This study is hoped to help future research and to contribute to the development of more influential delivery of visual political messages.

**Key Words** : Visual design element, Poster, Election, Political slogan, Vandalism

요 약 본 연구는 2018년에 치러진 제7회 전국동시지방선거에 나왔던 선거 포스터 중 특정 후보인의 포스터의 시각적 디자인 요소를 분석하고, 이 포스터가 훼손된 이유에 관해서 알아보기 위해 선행연구와 심층면담을 진행한다. 이 연구의 목적은 시각적 디자인 요소가 훼손된 포스터에 어떠한 영향력을 행사했는지 알아보고자 함에 있다. 연구 방법으로는 국내 선거공약포스터의 훼손 사례들을 조사하였다. 그리고 2차 실증 연구로 심층면담을 진행하여 특정 서울시장 후보의 포스터의 시각적 디자인 요소에 관하여 연령대별 여성과 남성 대상자들의 긍정적이거나 부정적인 견해를 조사하였다. 그 결과, 2가지 지점을 발견했다. 첫째, 시각적 디자인 요소들은 공약포스터의 훼손에 직접적 영향을 주지 않았다. 두 번째, 메시지를 담고 있는 정치적 슬로건이 가장 부정적인 영향을 주었다. 이 연구는 시각적 디자인 요소가 선거공약 포스터에 미치는 영향력에 관한 조사로써, 국내 선거 공약 포스터의 훼손과 연관지어 연구했다는 데 의의가 있다. 추후 연구를 통해 국내 선거공약 포스터의 시각적 디자인 요소가 영향력 있게 발전하는 데에 도움이 되기를 기대한다.

주제어 : 시각적 디자인 요소, 포스터, 선거포스터, 정치 슬로건, 훼손

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background and Goal

This study aims to examine the visual design elements of election posters and focus on a specific candidate from 2018 election for Mayor of Seoul to investigate whether visual design elements had influenced any act of vandalism of the candidate's election poster.

The election campaign for Mayor of Seoul took place from May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2018, to June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018. As a visual means of delivering political messages, 9 Mayor candidates promoted themselves through election posters and banners for the potential voters. During such campaign seasons, it is a crime to vandalize promotional banners and posters, because it violates the fairness of the election and the right for people to know. However, one of the election posters was consistently vandalized multiple times regardless of being a non-floor party candidate, to which fact that drew the most attention. It was the election poster of the youngest candidate running for election, the Green Party candidate Shin Ji-ye. In order for the election poster to become an effective visual means of delivering a political message, it was imperative to know whether visual design elements of the election poster had any influence over such provocation of vandalism[1-3].

### 1.2 Methodology and Scope

In order to find the relationship between visual design elements and the cause of vandalism, this study utilizes literature reviews on issues of election poster vandalism and further conducts the in-depth interviews on the perception of visual elements in Shin Ji-ye candidate's election poster.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Role and Design of Election Poster

Election posters have been part of the political advertisement scene since the 13<sup>th</sup> Presidential election in 1948. With the advancement of mass media, promotional ads ranged from traditional election campaigns to online social media campaigns[4].

### 2.2 Examples of Poster Vandalism

#### 2.2.1 Vandalism of a Specific Election Poster

In order to investigate the public vandalism of the political election posters, I reviewed the case of vandalism of Shin Ji-ye candidate's poster for the Mayor of Seoul election in 2018.



Fig. 1. Poster Vandalism Before and After

In the election, 27-year-old candidate Shin Ji-ye won 8 million votes and ranked the 4<sup>th</sup>. However, from the beginning of the campaign, total of 27 posters were destroyed, cut, burnt, and stolen. The Green Party referred to such act as “an attack against such candidate prompted as the feminist Mayor of Seoul.” The candidate herself saw the acts of vandalism as “an evidence of misogyny against young women politicians.” All in all, the party and the candidate emphasized that vandalism was not only against the law of fair election but also a hate crime against women[5-7].

#### 2.2.2 Vandalism of Election Posters

In order to compare with the statistics of incidents of vandalism, I investigated the number of incidents reported for acts of vandalism of election poster in 2018 election. According to Fig. 2, the police reported that total of 198 cases were reported as vandalism of election posters and banners, in which 77 people were

arrested and one person was imprisoned[8]. Like in most vandalism cases, a supporter of a certain party destroyed the opponent party’s election poster out of antagonism. Other reasons included destroying the posters under the influence of alcohol or tearing down the posters on the wall of a private property[9–11].

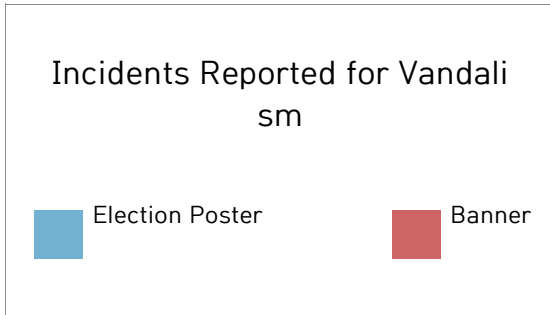


Fig. 2. Number of Reports in 2018 Mayor Election

### 3. Experiment and Result

#### 3.1 In-depth Interview

In order to further this study, I conducted in-depth interviews with 8 people about the visual elements of the election poster of Shin Ji-ye.

From January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019, to January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2019, total of 8 men and women residing in Seoul were interviewed about the positive, negative, or neutral feelings about the design elements of the election poster. Furthermore, they were asked to conjecture about the reasons for the vandalism of the election poster. Table 1 shows the basic information about the interviewees.

Table 1. Basic Info about Interviewees

No.	Gender	Age	Occupation	Major
1	Male	40	CEO	Entrepreneurship
2	Female	27	Employee	Airline Service
3	Female	27	Employee	Branding Design
4	Male	29	Student	Computational Mechanics
5	Male	26	Student	International Relations
6	Female	27	Teacher	Korean Language
7	Male	59	Doctor	Ophthalmology

8	Female	58	Doctor	Dermatology
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In terms of conducting eight in-depth interviews, I based the number of interviewees upon Jacob Nielsen, the user experience field academic, who suggested that no more than five interviewees are necessary for a usability test, as seen in Fig. 3[12]. So, the total interviewees for this experiment was eight.

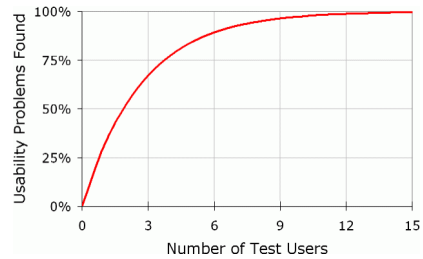


Fig. 3. Nielsen’s Usability Test Curve

#### 3.2 Visual Design Elements

According to preliminary studies, election posters were mainly composed of slogan, layout, illustration, color, and image. In order for election posters to grab attention and provide convincing pledges, they needed to stand out visually. Based on such preliminary studies, I also categorized the visual design elements into five visual design elements, which includes slogan, typography, color, image and layout[13,14].

#### 3.3 Result and Analysis of Experiment


Based on such visual criteria, interviewees were asked about the perception of each visual element the election poster.

Table 2. Slogan of the Election Poster

Criteria	Content
Slogan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feminist Mayor of Seoul</li> </ul> 
Positive	3 people
Negative	5 people


Slogan in Table 2 refers to the concise phrase of texts that effectively express emotional and functional benefit to people[15]. 62.5% of people responded negatively to slogan criteria(5 people). Overall, the first impression about the political slogan was that it did grab the attention with a clear expression of identity, but it caused antagonistic feelings against the potential voters. Among the total of The slogan, all in all, instilled a strong, impressive presence.

Table 3. Typography of the Election Poster

Criteria	Content
Typography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>angular type design</li> <li>curvy with a ribbon-like Korean character '스'</li> </ul>
	
Positive	3 people
Negative	5 people

Typography in Table 3 refers to how the letters are expressed. 62.5% of the interviewees deemed typography negatively (5 people). Overall, the intension of the typography was unclear. Even though the style was idiosyncratic, new, and fancy, it reminded people of Women's day, Breast Cancer Ribbon, or Sewol-ho incident ribbon. The typography design, all in all, seemed very different from other posters and ambiguous in intention.


Table 4. Color of the Election Poster

Criteria	Content
Color	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>bright and high contrast green</li> <li>white for the text</li> </ul>
	
Positive	7 people
Negative	1 people

The color element of the poster in Table 4 is mostly bright green on the background and white for the text

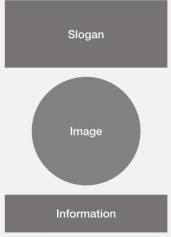
component. Majority of people answered positively(87.5%, 7 people). It expressed the identity of the Green Party very well. Using green was favorable to potential viewers because it visualized the Green party. Color component, overall, received the most positive feedback.

Table 5. Image of the Election Poster

Criteria	Content
Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>portrait of a bust shot</li> <li>twisted body side</li> <li>low-angle</li> </ul>
	
Positive	6 people
Negative	2 people

The portrait of the candidate from Table 5 was shot above the waist and from the side of the body in a low angle. 75% of interviewees answered that the image was positive to them (6 people). The image was trustable, and the candidate projected a strong, clever, and confident atmosphere. On the other hand, she seemed distant and cold. Overall, the candidate was seen as showing her best angle and optimum view of herself as an intelligent, young women.

Table 6. Layout of the Election Poster

Criteria	Content
Layout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>full frame</li> <li>the image in the middle</li> </ul>
	
Positive	4 people
Negative	4 people

Layout in Table 6 refers to the composition of all the visual elements. Same number of percentage revealed that the layout was neutral(each 50%, 4 people). It was viewed that the traditional format was boring, but the layout for the particular poster seemed fresh. However, the number and candidate name did not read well because of the emphasis on the top section.

3.3.1 Positive Aspect of the Visual Element

Based on the five criteria of visual design elements of the election poster, the positive aspect of the visual elements was that her case of visual identity had a strong presence. There was one main reason.

Most of all, the overall typography, color, layout, and the image together intended to create a clear identity of the candidate and enabled the persona to stand out visually. It was seen that she wanted to show her presence and she achieved the goal.

3.3.2 Negative Aspect of the Visual Element

The negative impressions from the interviewees were derived from the content of the political slogan. There were two main reasons.

Firstly, ‘feminist’ identity was not a middle ground. The vast emphasis on one gender raised a lot of extreme feelings.

Second, she did not seem like the candidate running for Mayor of Seoul, because a potential Mayor of Seoul was seen as a friendly being who would encompass every citizen of Seoul. Her political propensity and identity and the entire image seemed to promise something else. In the end, it was questioned if the candidate was serious about participating in the election. Also, it was suggested that if she wanted to be voted for the Mayor of Seoul. the specific political slogan should have been left out.

3.3.3 Results of Experiment Analysis

As a result of the experiment, Table 7 shows that 75% of the respondents thought the content of the political slogan was most likely to have caused the

vandalism of the election poster.

Table 7. Reason for Vandalism

Reason for Vandalism	No. of People
Slogan	6
Typography	0
Color	0
Image	2
Layout	0

It was found out that the keyword ‘feminist’ could not convince the six interviewees. It was viewed that the slogan will antagonize some people. The political message was very strong. Rather than gathering more votes, it seemed to target a specific audience and convey a limited message, which may seem uncomfortable to some. Ideally, differences in political preferences should be respected in elections. But, people with extreme gender stereotypes could dislike feminists without understanding the concept and pledges the candidate promised. The stronger the political statement was, the stronger the reaction against it.

4. Conclusion

This study aimed to gain insight about the influence of the visual design elements of the election poster and the reasons for vandalism in the Green Party candidate. As an experiment about this topic, I conducted eight in-depth interviews and analyzed the positive and negative evaluations. As the result of the experiment analysis, two findings were deducted.

Firstly, the visual design elements did not influence the provocation of the vandalism. The visual elements created a strong persona and image, but they were not the direct reasons for the possible antagonistic acts on the posters.

Second, the most negative responses were about the content of the political slogan. The influence of the content of the political statement was strong. Political

message, rather than the visual design elements, seemed to prompt the active dislike of the election posters.

In conclusion, this study researched the visual design elements of the specific candidate's election poster and the reasons of vandalism. This study is meaningful in providing insight into the positive and negative influences of the visual design elements of the election poster and finding out that the content of slogan had the most influence for provoking the vandalism. It is hoped that this study will provide a preliminary study for more influential visual element development in the election posters.

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