Visual Framing of Patriotism and National Identity on the Covers of Der Spiegel

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Abstract

Patriotism in Germany has been a controversial issue since the Nazi era. Despite the fear and hesitations surrounding the idea of German pride and national identity, Der Spiegel, one of Germany’s major national news magazines, showed an increasing visual presence of national identity symbols on its covers following key historical events: the building of the Berlin Wall, the reunification of Germany, the adoption of the euro, and the 2006 World Cup.

Keywords: Der Spiegel, German history, German national identity, German patriotism, magazine covers, visual framing

Introduction

Germany’s Der Spiegel news magazine was founded in 1946, when the nation lay in ruins along with the country’s concept of patriotism and national identity following the Second
World War. More than 60 years later, Germany has become an economic powerhouse. Yet the nation’s self-regard has rebounded more slowly. The impact of Germany’s national socialist past resulted in a split country, where for years Germans were reluctant to show any form of national pride in their country. Those who argue that it has again become acceptable to display positive regard for Germany tend also to argue that this change has come not incrementally but in spurts as a reaction to notable events that have galvanized the attention of Germans. What better way to test this view than to examine how Der Spiegel visually presented themes of patriotism and national identity on its covers in the periods surrounding events of special import to Germans? This study did just that, employing a multi-method approach of quantitative visual framing and qualitative analysis of images and symbols surrounding four key events in Germany: the building of the Berlin Wall, the reunification of Germany, the adoption of the euro, and the 2006 World Cup. These four events were chosen for this study because of the influence they had on Germany’s sense of self, understanding of national pride, and the developing form of German identity. The result has significance both for the study of magazines and for scholars of modern German history.

**Literature Review**

Since the early 1900s, images on magazine covers have shaped and supported ideals, promoted trends, and established historic icons, such as James Montgomery Flagg’s depiction of Uncle Sam on the cover of Collier’s (Heller & Fili, 1996). With the increasing importance that is placed on visuals as framing devices, a framing study was appropriate for analyzing how the visual elements on magazine covers act as symbolic tools for representing ideals within a culture (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). It is the front cover of a magazine that initially draws the reader’s curiosity to discover the meaning behind the cover lines and the captivating image. As a result, the appeal factor of a magazine cover increases readership (Held, 2005). Therefore, examining the design elements and overall images on the covers of Der Spiegel reveals not only what magazine designers believe visually entices the reader to pick up the magazine but also how the magazine frames its concerns.

The first researcher associated with the idea of framing was Erving Goffman (Simon & Xenos, 2000). Goffman (1974) described frame analysis in terms of an organization of experience that an individual processes in his or her mind. Reese (2001) stated that frames mainly serve as organizational tools. According to Tuchman (1978), readers learn about themselves and others within and outside their country through frames. Tuchman added that “the news aims to tell us what we want to know, need to know, and should know” (p. 1). Although media frames alone can create positive and negative impressions on a reader (Reese, 2001), the effects of framing also depend on the way in which the reader interprets what he or she sees and reads.

According to Lester (2005), there are various forms of visual images present all around the world. Images draw a reader’s attention and help the reader more accurately understand the reality of a situation because visuals more easily prompt emotional responses.
from an audience (King & Lester, 2005; Lester, 2005). It was the rise of television, computers, and the Internet that resulted in a newfound appreciation for visuals and the way the public perceives visual messages (Lester, 2005). Messaris and Abraham (2001) noted that the most relevant elements of images are those that enhance or mitigate certain consequences. Messaris and Abraham encouraged readers to pay closer attention to visuals as framing devices within the media and how this plays into the way an audience interprets the news.

Although the term “frames” in relation to magazine design refers to the outer margins on a page (Conover, 1985), the idea of visual framing entails more than its literal definition. Research on framing tends to focus on words (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). Visual framing, however, is still a part of making sense of the news. According to Kim and Kelly (2007), visual depictions of a story are just as influential as the actual printed words on a page. Kim and Kelly argued that visual framing provides a better understanding of how the media frame an event or issue to the public. Regardless of whether a message is textual or visual, all messages in the media have literal and symbolic components (Lester, 2005) that can affect the visual communication of images in the news.

Starting at a young age, one is taught how to process information based on words printed in a book (Ryan & Conover, 2003). Yet, according to Ryan and Conover, learning often depends on how one visually understands things. Similar to learning about words, letters, and spelling, one can study the significant elements of visual communication, such as grammar, syntax, language, and style (Ryan & Conover, 2003). Understanding these elements of visual messages depends on the interaction between the eyes and the brain (Lester, 2005). The brain tends to remember images that are highly meaningful and leave a lasting impression on our sense of understanding (Lester, 2005). Lester (2005) wrote: “Visual messages that are remembered have the greatest power to inform, educate, and persuade an individual and a culture” (p. vii). Visual messages are more prominent and more easily remembered than words because of the emotional attachment a reader associates with visuals (King & Lester, 2005; Lester, 2005), whether it is a powerful image on the front page of a newspaper or a photo on the cover of a magazine.

The cover, or what Conover (1985) calls the “display window,” is what the public first sees, thereby leaving a lasting impression (Johnson & Prijatel, 2007; White, 1982). Conover identified the cover as the most important element of a magazine in terms of design. He wrote: “[The cover] not only identifies the publication but it says something about its personality” (Conover, 1985, p. 219). According to Johnson and Prijatel (2007), about 80% of consumer magazine newsstand sales are determined by the cover image. What is presented on the cover can determine whether a passerby decides to buy the magazine. Held (2005) stated that the cover is a magazine’s most important selling tool. Johnson (2002) added that “magazine publishers, editors, and circulation directors know the importance of the cover image as both a newsstand impulse buy and as a brand” (para. 2). Therefore, magazine publishers depend on a cover’s self-promotion as a means of gaining
readership (Held, 2005). Thus, a magazine cover must be convincing, express a sense of value, and represent a sense of identity (White, 1982). Some of the elements that help accentuate the cover image include framing, layout, lighting effects, props, and an engaging caption (Pompper & Feeney, 2002). The cover’s design should be discernible from other magazines, intrigue the reader to flip to the inside pages, and represent the overall mood and tone of the magazine (Conover, 1985). The magazine focused on in this study, Der Spiegel, is known for some of its distinct design choices, including the red frame that surrounds the images on the front covers (Aust, 2004).

Despite the continuous debate among historians, philosophers, and social scientists about the role of national identity (Huang, Roy, Rethen, Wei, & Wells, 2006), for many scholars, national identity primarily signifies the key principles and customs within a nation (Luther, 2002). According to Andrews (2007), national identity is “simply part of human life” (p. 13) that is present the moment we are born. She wrote: “The process of early childhood socialization lays the groundwork for sympathetic reception to national myths, but as we mature, we must find a role for ourselves in the meaning of those stories” (p. 13). National identity is defined as a “constructed and public national self-image based on membership in a political community as well as history, myths, symbols, language, and cultural norms commonly held by members of a nation” (Hutcheson, Domke, Billeaudeaux, & Garland, 2004, p. 28). For Staab (1998), communities develop an emotional connection to a nation, which provides direction in an individual’s search for a sense of belonging in the world. Schröder (2002) believed that the world could not exist without nations. He stated that the development of a nation primarily rests on the collaboration of nations, thereby citing Germany’s connection to countries such as France and Poland (Schröder, 2002). Schröder (2002) nevertheless stressed the longstanding concerns and uncertainties surrounding national identity in Germany resulting from a series of historical occurrences.

Even after the German reunification, Germany’s overall national identity was associated with such characteristics as angst, aggressiveness, and egotism (Fulbrook, 1999). Fulbrook believed that after the Nazi past, some form of national pride was improbable. According to Neumann (2005), few places in the world have experienced such a torn notion of national identity as Germany. This, however, did not prevent Germans from seeking to newly define themselves and their country in spite of earlier classifications of the so-called “German self,” which Inthorn (2007) described as “insecure and struggled between ethnic and civil notions” (p. 9). Fulbrook (1999) wrote that today Germans classify themselves based on shared ancestry. Schröder (2002), on the other hand, held that Germans are defined based on how others perceive them. He added that today Germany is founded on the principles of freedom, justice, solidarity, and participation (Schröder, 2002). Fulbrook (1999) mentioned that in other parts of the world, for example the United States, national identity rests on common ideals and goals. She wrote:

National identity does not exist, as an essence to be sought for, found and defined. It is a human construct, evident only when sufficient
people believe in some version of collective identity for it to be a social reality, embodied in and transmitted through institutions, laws, customs, beliefs and practices. (p. 1)

Although national identity has varying degrees of importance within cultural communities around the globe, the media have the specific role of constructing and reproducing national identity (Huang et al., 2006).

Printed content, power elites, and political conditions are some of the key issues that can influence how an audience interprets the depiction of national identity in the media (Luther, 2002). Luther discussed the role of power structures in overseeing the image of a nation that is presented in the media. Luther examined a series of articles in newspapers in Japan and the United States to verify a sense of consistency in the representation of national identities between 1975 and 1995. She concluded:

…a nation’s sense of identity is manifested in press writings, through conveyed images, and when examined over a broad span of time within the context of historical events researchers may be able to more fully understand not only the complexities involved in the interplay between structural conditions, national identities, and images of nations, but also the important role these images may play in the communication processes between nations. (p. 80)

Similarly, Huang et al. (2006) discussed the presence of national identity within print media by looking at the relationship between newspaper content and reading, which are “inextricably interrelated and both contribute to the discursive production of national identity in significant ways” (p. 5). Huang et al. defined national identity in terms of its two forms: patriotism and nationalism. For the purpose of this study, the definition of patriotism as the devotion, love, support, and defense of one’s home place was applied (Huang et al. 2006). Nationalism, on the other hand, is “an ideology advocating the formation of a separate nation-state for each distinct ethnic group” (Flowerdew & Leong, 2007, p. 274). National conflicts often result in an increase in the presence of nationalism and patriotism (Huang et al., 2006; Hutcheson et al., 2004; Mosche, 2004). On the other hand, Skitka (2005) stated that patriotism is able to exist without nationalism. While themes of national identity reflect certain attitudes of national pride, images of patriotism continue to promote unity and pride in the mass media that reach audiences all around the world.

Patriotism, once associated with the “blind obedience to a dictatorial leader” (Beard, 2006, para. 5) in the “Fatherland” that is Germany, has since transformed in meaning and value among Germans. Beard (2006) stated that many Germans are still reluctant to act openly patriotic and proud of their nation. Burbank (2003) related German patriotism to “aggression,” “extremism,” and “ethnocentrism” and considered it problematic to declare a certain German pride. Beard (2006) wrote: “If you are a proud German you generally do not express that by flying the national flag or singing the national anthem, both of which have
been more associated with Germany’s far-right parties” (para. 5). Poschardt (2006) attributed the current lack of national pride to the fact that he sees Germany as a delayed nation, in the sense that even after 60 years of shame and self-consciousness (Boyes, 2006), Germans cannot entirely break free from their past.

Despite current questions over the meaning of patriotism in Germany, Beard (2006) argued that Germans are “waking up to the fact that it is normal to be patriotic” (para. 4). However, the idea of German patriotism continues to develop (Inthorn, 2007) as Germans discover new ways of identifying with their nation. Therefore, this study attempted to identify the gradual changes in visual patriotism and national identity, considering Germany’s past and paying particular attention to key events that transformed the meaning of German patriotism and the way Germans perceive themselves.

The review of the literature led to the following hypotheses:

**H1**: The number of symbols of German national identity on the covers of Der Spiegel will increase across the four seminal events: the building of the Berlin Wall, the reunification of Germany, the adoption of the euro, and the 2006 World Cup.

**H2**: The German flag and colors are the visual forms of patriotism and national identity that are used most commonly on the covers of Der Spiegel for the chosen events, as opposed to the symbols of the German coat of arms, political figures, and symbols coded as “other.”

**H3**: There are more symbols of patriotism and national identity on Der Spiegel covers after each of the series of events than before the events.

A quantitative analysis was used to assess each of the above hypotheses, while a qualitative analysis was used to address how the changes in German attitudes toward patriotism and national identity were visually reflected on the covers of Der Spiegel. Each of the hypotheses had its qualitative counterpart with the following open-ended research questions:

**RQ1**: How did the symbols of German national identity on the covers of Der Spiegel change across the four seminal events?

**RQ2**: Which visual forms of patriotism and national identity were most often used on the covers of Der Spiegel?

**RQ3**: How did the symbols of patriotism and national identity after each of the series of events compare with those before the events on the covers of Der Spiegel?
Method

This research studied how *Der Spiegel*, a weekly German news magazine, visually framed symbols of patriotism and national identity on its front covers and how these depictions varied before and after certain major events in Germany. This study examined a series of *Der Spiegel* covers through a combined quantitative and qualitative analysis. Through a content analysis, the covers were analyzed for the presence of specific images that were classified as depicting patriotism and/or national identity. The symbols were defined as patriotism and/or national identity based on the context in which they were portrayed. Some of the determining factors for categorizing the symbols as patriotism or national identity included the headline describing the cover, the person depicted on the cover, the image as a whole, and the overall way in which the symbol was portrayed on the cover following a key event.

*Der Spiegel* was chosen as the subject of research because of its unique history as a postwar German news magazine and also its distinctive cover artwork. *Der Spiegel*, which is German for “The Mirror,” was founded by the British in 1946, when it was originally called *Diese Woche* [This Week] (“*Der Spiegel*,” n.d.), with the intent of providing objective news to Germans (“The History of *Der Spiegel*,” 2011). First published in 1947, *Diese Woche* was later renamed “*Der Spiegel*” under the ownership of Rudolf Augstein (“The History of *Der Spiegel*,” 2011), who remained the primary owner from 1946 until his death in 2002 (Landler, 2004). Today the magazine’s ownership is divided among three groups: Augstein’s family, the magazine’s employees, and the publishing company Gruner & Jahr, which has had part ownership of *Der Spiegel* since the 1970s (Landler, 2004). *Der Spiegel* is the oldest and major news magazine in Germany among its competitors, including *Focus*, *Der Stern*, and *Bunte* (“Germany press,” 2011). It is often compared with *Time* and *Newsweek*, its American equivalents (“Germany press,” 2011). In its first year of publication, *Der Spiegel* had a circulation of approximately 15,000 (“The History of *Der Spiegel*,” 2011). Its current circulation is 1.07 million (“Media landscape: Germany,” 2010). Considered liberal in its political stance, *Der Spiegel* is known for its quality investigative journalism as well as controversial stories exposing scandals surrounding major political figures (“Germany press,” 2011).

*Der Spiegel* is widely acknowledged for its front cover depictions and distinctive visual trademarks, such as the red frame featured on each of the covers. According to Stefan Aust (2004), the former editor-in-chief of *Der Spiegel*, the magazine’s covers over the years have featured the work of some of the best illustrators. He wrote: “Each week, the cover of *Der Spiegel* serves as the magazine’s current calling card, awakening the interest of the casual passerby and bringing the subject on the cover story to visual life” (p. 6). By examining the artistic work of illustrators on *Der Spiegel* covers, this study focused on the transformation in the value of patriotism and national identity in relation to key historical events in Germany.
For this study, patriotism and national identity were defined and coded as two different concepts. Patriotism is defined as the love of a country (Huang et al., 2006). National identity is the public image that is constructed based on an individual’s membership within a nation (Hutcheson et al., 2004). These definitions of patriotism and national identity, the distinction between the symbols, and the context in which they were presented determined whether one of the symbols was more likely associated with a sense of patriotism or national identity or a combination of both. It is important to examine patriotism and national identity within Germany in relation to its history as a reunified nation as well as to how forms of patriotism and national identity are increasingly manifested after the gradual acceptance and developing devotion of the German community to its nation. Therefore, the growing significance of German patriotism and national identity on Der Spiegel covers was identified and analyzed through a quantitative and qualitative method.

Since a magazine cover was the primary subject of this study, a qualitative approach was an important means of evaluating the way in which the patriotism and national identity symbols were visually portrayed through images and design elements alone. The qualitative analysis of images, as opposed to words, is an increasingly productive method (Siegesmund, 2008). As part of the observational analysis, the cover image was first studied as a whole—more specifically, the importance of the image in relation to Germany. The visual details of each of the covers were then studied, including the use of colors, the cover title, and the size of the person or object on the cover. Looking at the covers from a design perspective emphasized Der Spiegel’s particular stylistic choices and provided insight into the visual meaning of German patriotism and national identity. In addition, the brief introductory paragraphs that accompanied each cover on Der Spiegel’s website were read for context in order to gain a better understanding of the meaning behind the cover image and the person or object depicted.

A total of 295 covers were coded out of the 1,104 covers from the four event periods. The 295 covers were coded based on the presence of one or more of the patriotism and/or national identity symbols. A total of 343 symbols of patriotism and national identity were identified on the covers. Of the 295 covers, 17 had more than one symbol of patriotism and national identity. By including the 53 covers from 1947 and the 55 covers from 2009, this study sought to visually distinguish how patriotism and national identity was depicted during Der Spiegel’s first year of publication versus today.

Der Spiegel’s covers were examined two years before and two years after four major historical events in Germany for a total of five years for each event. The year 2004 was counted twice for two of the events—the adoption of the euro and the 2006 World Cup. This study also looked at the presence of symbols in the year that each event occurred. The events and the years of analysis included the following:

- The building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 (coded the years 1959 to 1963)
- The reunification of Germany in 1989 (coded the years 1987 to 1991)
Visual Framing on Der Spiegel Covers

- The adoption of the euro in 2002 (coded the years 2000 to 2004)
- The 2006 World Cup (coded the years 2004 to 2008)

The individual covers for this study were accessed through an online archive available through the Der Spiegel website <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/>.

Patriotism and national identity symbols

The covers that displayed some forms of patriotism and/or national identity were analyzed and visually coded for symbolic images that are historically relevant to Germany. Nine variables were coded on the 295 covers between 1947 and 2009. The first three coding categories were general; the remaining categories broke down the symbols into specific types.

1. Patriotism symbols
2. National identity symbols
3. Symbols of both patriotism and national identity
4. Country flag
5. Country colors
6. Political figures
7. Coat of arms
8. Any other patriotism and national identity symbols that presented themselves
9. Tone

For covers in which symbols, such as a photo or an illustration of a politician, could not be identified or if a cover was unavailable on Der Spiegel’s website, the covers were coded as unable to be determined. Only 14 issues were coded as unavailable.

Symbols are an important means of gaining insight into identity formation (Feinstein, 2001) and were, therefore, a relevant aspect of this study. Germany’s flag consists of three horizontal stripes—black (top), red (middle), and gold/yellow (bottom) (“Black, red, and gold,” 2011). The flag was coded in its varying forms and shapes. In addition, the flag from East Germany, featuring the coat of arms of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), was coded and analyzed.

While the country flag is a longstanding image of Germany, the national colors—black, red, and yellow (“Black, red, and gold,” 2011)—also signify Germany’s sense of identity. For the coding process, all the national colors had to be present on the covers and depicted in the context of Germany but not pertaining to other countries that have similar national colors.

From Konrad Adenauer to Angela Merkel, the first female chancellor of Germany (Beard, 2006), several key political figures have greatly influenced Germany and embody a sense of German national identity (O’Connell, 2009). For this study, political figures
constituted German-elected legislative or executive officials, including chancellors, mayors, vice chancellors, and heads of political parties.

Germany’s current coat of arms features the image of a Weimar black eagle with spread wings within a yellow background (“The federal eagle,” 2011). In addition, the East German coat of arms from the GDR, which consists of a hammer and compass surrounded by a ring of rye (“Bundeswappen,” 2011), was coded.

Symbols that were coded as “other” included depictions of Germany’s national currency, the Deutsche mark (D-mark) and the euro; iconic German monuments such as the Brandenburg Gate; and historically relevant representations of Germany, including Germania. Other examples of national symbols included the geographic shape of Germany and the image of a German passport.

**Intercoder reliability**

As a means of supporting and comparing the data collected, this study sought to demonstrate inter-coder reliability by training a second coder. By providing the definitions of the symbols of patriotism and national identity, the secondary coder coded 10% of Der Spiegel covers. The secondary coder was given 52 covers pertaining to a particular year for event one (the building of the Berlin Wall), as well as 52 covers pertaining to a particular year for event two (the reunification of Germany). The data collected from the primary researcher and secondary coder was compared through the Scott’s pi formula as referenced in Baxter and Babbie (2003):

\[
\pi = \frac{\% \text{ of agreement observed} - \% \text{ of agreement expected}}{1 - \% \text{ of agreement expected for each coder}}
\]

Two of the eight variables had a Scott’s pi of 1.0 (100%), namely political figures and unable to be determined. The reliability agreement of the remaining six variables was between .82 (82%) and .92 (92%): main frame (patriotism, national identity, or both) .92 (92%), colors .90 (90%), coat of arms .90 (90%), other .88 (88%), and flag .85 (85%).

In addition to specific patriotism and national identity symbols, the covers were coded for tone, namely positive, negative, or neutral. Negative national identity was considered anything from negative German stereotypes to a critical viewpoint of German politicians. Positive national identity within Germany was attributed to pro-German ideals that encourage a sense of unity among Germans. Neutral was defined as not clearly positive or negative. The tone of the covers was determined based on the coders’ overall first impression of the cover image, as well as the cover lines, which provided insight into the meaning behind the image. The tone results from the researcher and secondary coder were tested through the intercoder reliability test and resulted in an 82% reliability agreement.

**Choice of events**
Construction of the Berlin Wall began on August 13, 1961, and was intended to prevent East Germans from traveling to West Germany (Burgan, 2008). The division of Germany not only greatly affected the East and West German ways of life, but it also influenced Germans’ perception of national identity as East and West Germans developed their own sense of “true Germany” (O’Connell, 2009). The building of the Berlin Wall was an important historical event for the focus of this study in relation to the meaning of patriotism and national identity at the time and how this was reflected in a primarily Western media source, Der Spiegel (“Der Spiegel,” n.d.), during the time of a divided Germany.

After a 28-year fight for the freedom to journey beyond a physical border, the Berlin Wall came crashing down on November 9, 1989 (Burgan, 2008). Although Germany was not officially recognized as a reunified nation until October 3, 1990 (Burgan, 2008), November 9, 1989, was chosen for this study because the fall of the Berlin Wall resulted in a union between East and West Germans, as they could freely cross the border once again. While the fall of the Berlin Wall signified the end of the Cold War (Burgan, 2008), it also caused Germans to question their identification with their nation (Watson, 1992), which was struggling to overcome the past.

Like the fall of the Berlin Wall, which paved the way for a reunified Germany, the adoption of the euro, which officially took place on January 1, 2002, resulted in a unifying effect across Europe (“The euro,” 2011). Although the euro started to be used in 1999 as a virtual currency and for accounting purposes, it was not until 2002 that it was introduced to replace European currencies, including the Deutsche mark, as its physical form as banknotes and coins (“The euro,” 2011). Therefore, for this study, 2002 was chosen as the year of the adoption of the euro.

Germans expressed a newfound acceptance of their country at the 2006 World Cup as millions of viewers around the world watched Germany and Costa Rica battle on the soccer field (Beard, 2006). Many compared the effects of the 2006 World Cup on Germans’ understanding of patriotism and national identity with the impact of Princess Diana’s death on Britain’s self-image (Boyes, 2006).

Results

Quantitative findings

More than one-fourth of the 1,104 covers displayed a symbol of patriotism, national identity, or both. Of the 295 covers coded, 85.5% featured national identity symbols, 3% patriotism symbols, and 11.2% both. There were a total of 343 patriotism and national identity symbols, with 47 covers that featured two symbols and four covers that depicted three symbols. Political figures were the most often-used symbol, 51.4%, followed by “other,” 16.3%; the flag, 14.0%; coat of arms, 10.6%; and colors, 7.7%.
The quantitative analysis provided support for two of the three hypotheses. H1 was supported. The five national identity symbols increased across the years of the four events. There was partial support of H3. The number of symbols was greater in the two years after two of the events— the building of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany—than in the two years before those events. H2 predicted that the flag would be most used on the covers. However, the results showed that political figures were most used, followed by “other” and the flag. The following section describes the results of the two confirmed hypotheses, H1 and H3, followed by the findings of the three research questions.

The first hypothesis was confirmed. The number of symbols of German national identity on the covers of Der Spiegel increased across the four seminal events: the building of the Berlin Wall, the reunification of Germany, the adoption of the euro, and the 2006 World Cup.

To test the statistical difference in data between all four events, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Table 1 shows the percentage of each national identity symbol in the five years analyzed for each event, followed by a one-way ANOVA documenting the statistically significant shift for each symbol.

| Table 1 |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| **Der Spiegel’s Display of National Identity Symbols on Its Covers During the Four Historic Events** |
|                | **Berlin Wall** n = 59 | **Reunification** n = 119 | **Euro** n = 75 | **World Cup** n = 73 |
| **Political figures** | 84.7%             | 43.7%             | 48.0%           | 47.9%           |
| **Flag**           | 1.7               | 14.3              | 16.0            | 17.8            |
| **Colors**         | 1.7               | 11.8              | 5.3             | 8.2             |
| **Coat of arms**   | 5.1               | 14.3              | 9.3             | 9.6             |
| **Other**          | 6.8               | 16.0              | 25.3            | 20.5            |

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The most obvious difference is that in sheer numbers, far more symbols were used during the reunification of Germany than during the other three events.
Although the ANOVA results indicate that each of the five symbol categories changed significantly across the four time periods, the changes are neither consistent proportionately nor numerically. For example, although the political figures symbol plunged percentage-wise during the reunification of Germany, the number of political figure symbols increased from 50 during the first event (the building of the Berlin Wall) to 52 after the event. However, the number of political figure symbols decreased substantially in the adoption of the euro. Nevertheless, the percentage remained relatively stable because of the overall numerical decline in symbols. Although the percentage of flag symbols increased during the adoption of the euro and the 2006 World Cup, the number of flag symbols was low because of the overall decrease in symbols. The symbols of colors and coat of arms also dropped numerically, which was greater than indicated by the percentage change.

The third hypothesis was partially confirmed. It predicted that there would be more symbols in the two years after each event than in the two years before each event. This necessitated eliminating the middle year of each event.

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<th>Table 2: Patriotism and National Identity Symbols on Der Spiegel’s Covers Before and After Four Historic Events</th>
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Table 2 indicates that the overall increase in symbols from before to after each of the events is more complex than the third hypothesis suggests. Only the covers before and after the German reunification changed significantly, with a 70.5% increase \(X^2 (1, N = 92) = 11,226, p \leq .001\). Increases in symbols from the building of the Berlin Wall to the adoption of the euro and the 2006 World Cup were nullified by the sharp decline in the number of political figures, which began after the reunification of Germany.

The difference in the number of symbols before the building of the Berlin Wall and before the reunification of Germany are statistically significant \(X^2 (1, N = 55) = p \leq .04\), as are the differences after the building of Berlin Wall and after the reunification of Germany \(X^2 (1, N = 85) = 19.119, p \leq .001\). However, the chi-square results after the reunification together with after the adoption of the euro indicate a significant decrease rather than an increase in symbols \(X^2 (1, N = 84) = 20.449, p \leq .001\).
Several other major fluctuations in Der Spiegel’s use of symbols are evident by scanning Table 2. Nearly one third (31.8%) of the covers featured a national identity or patriotism symbol. The use of symbols ranged from as few as 20% in the two years before the building of the Berlin Wall to more than double (55%) immediately after the reunification of Germany. An examination of the individual years reveals that 1990 featured more symbols than any other year; 29 covers had symbols of patriotism and national identity, of which 10 displayed two symbols and two had three symbols. The year of the German reunification was second, with 23 covers.

The use of political figures declined proportionately, especially after the reunification of Germany, as the flag followed by the coat of arms and the German national colors were used more often. However, the differences in the number of symbols render some percentages deceptive. For example, there was one more cover featuring a political figure in the period after the building of the Berlin Wall than before, but proportionately the political figures symbol decreased because of the increased use of the symbols, especially the flag and coat of arms.

**Qualitative findings**

The major findings from the qualitative analysis revealed that Der Spiegel’s earlier covers primarily portrayed images of political figures as a form of national identity. Overall depictions of the German flag and national colors were displayed in subtle contexts. Rather than print a full-page image of the German flag, the covers tended to use the flag for symbolic meanings, for example in the form of a tie around the neck of a politician. Similarly, the national colors were often used for the cover lines. The qualitative observations also revealed that most occurrences of the German coat of arms, both past and current, had a negative connotation. Lastly, the most common forms of symbols coded as “other” were major historical monuments in Germany, as shown by the quantitative results of the study.

While the German flag and national colors were often featured on Der Spiegel’s later covers up until the 2006 World Cup, in the magazine’s first few years of publication, national identity on its covers pertained to political figures and how they represented a former war-torn country. At the time Der Spiegel did not tend to portray politicians in a negative or positive light but rather focused on what the different individuals on the covers meant for Germany. While Der Spiegel often praised the faces on the covers, it also questioned politicians’ goals of improving Germany. Certain covers attributed a child-like demeanor to a politician’s actions, such as displayed on Issue 10 from 1987 (Figure 1). The
cover depicts former Minister of Treasury Gerhard Stoltenberg blowing bubbles, as Der Spiegel is openly criticizing his decisions.

Despite the decreasing presence of Germany’s coat of arms following the reunification of Germany, the image of the Weimar eagle nevertheless represented Germany in a range of contexts. The Weimar eagle often referenced a sense of hopelessness, fear, and frustration among Germans. In other instances, the Weimar eagle was paired with the image of the German colors or a politician. Yet with the newly reunified Germany, the coat of arms of the GDR also subtly appeared as a symbol alluding to Germany’s past. At times, the coat of arms of the GDR was not immediately recognizable. In context, the coat of arms often referenced the end of the GDR, like the crumbling coat of arms portrayed on Issue 45 from 1989 (Figure 2).

Unlike today’s German coat of arms, which features the Weimar eagle, the coat of arms from the GDR consisted of a hammer and compass surrounded by a ring of rye (“Bundeswappen,” 2011). Although the Nazi version of the coat of arms had long been retired, Issue 19 from 2001 (Figure 3) is a reflection of the past and the shadow that Hitler continues to cast on Germany.
Although Adolf Hitler was sporadically portrayed on Der Spiegel’s covers as a historical reference throughout the event years of this study, during the years pertaining to the building of the Berlin Wall, Der Spiegel featured various current political figures for a wide range of subjects, and they were, therefore, most often seen on the covers. As the quantitative data revealed, political figures were a commonly used symbol on Der Spiegel across all the events. The covers from the 1950s presented political figures in a simple manner, with a single color background and small captions. This later evolved, as more color, diverse backgrounds, and bigger headlines were applied to the depiction of political figures, reflecting the technological advances in print layout. Der Spiegel emphasized the choice of background, often using images relating to nature or weather to connect to the political figure on the cover.

For example, Issue 8 from 1990 (Figure 4) portrays the public dispute between two politicians—former chancellor Helmut Kohl and the chairman of the Left Party Hans Modrow—by featuring a dark sky and thick clouds. The dark and light colors of the sky convey the mixed emotions felt between East Germany and West Germany, as corroborated by the words “Angst im Osten—Ärger im Westen” [Fear in the East—Anger in the West]. The darker cloud appears to linger over Modrow, while lighter clouds surround Kohl. The choice of background colors, the depiction of the politicians, and the cover lines convey the growing rift between the two politicians, specifically Modrow’s anger of Kohl’s lack of financial support of East Germany (“Der Spiegel,” 2011).

Der Spiegel used images of weather and other aspects of the natural environment as metaphors for certain political issues. For example, Issue 3 from 1987 (Figure 5) features an image of a large sunflower portrayed as the rising sun with the words “Der Grüne Traum” [The Green Dream] in relation to the Green Party.
From historical figures to weather-specific conditions, political figures were grouped with a diverse selection of background images throughout the years, including the black, red, and yellow horizontal stripes of the German flag. Sometimes a politician would directly flaunt the flag, as on Issue 9 from 2004 (Figure 6), in which the cover is crowded with various German politicians.

The German flag shared cover space with major politicians at the time and with general depictions of what it meant to be German, especially in the reunified nation. Issue 39 from 1990 (Figure 7) represents the struggles that the newly united Germans faced, as people who once lived what seemed like worlds apart on opposite sides of the Berlin Wall were to coexist together. With the words “Vereint aber Fremd: Die ungleichen Deutschen” [United but Strangers: The Unequal Germans], Issue 39 is addressing the differences between the East and West German societies on the cover by accentuating their differences in mentality, lifestyle, and appearance, even though they are bound together by their nationality, as is represented by their intertwined neckties featuring the German colors. The flag as a necktie symbolizes social status, yet it also emphasizes the everyman quality shared among fellow tie-wearing Germans. In other words, the flag on the tie is a way of associating the two individuals on the cover with the German public and the similar struggles that citizens were facing regarding whether Germans could truly once again become one nation after being separated for 40 years (Der Spiegel, 2011).
While the image of the country flag on the necktie became a reoccurring motif on the covers, especially during the time of the reunification, Der Spiegel also focused on the depiction of the capital, Berlin. The cityscape was generally used as a backdrop, drawing focus to the main image, as on Issue 44 from 1990 (Figure 8).

Despite the lack of covers before 1989 with images pertaining to Berlin, which at that time merely pertained to a divided country, the later covers celebrated the “Comeback einer Weltstadt” [Comeback of a World Metropolis], as shown on Issue 12 from 2007 (Figure 9).
Even though Berlin-related images were not often featured on Der Spiegel, the covers nevertheless highlighted major historical occurrences within Germany’s capital, especially the politics pertaining to the significance of the Berlin Wall for Germans. During the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, every few covers had a political figure who was involved in or influenced the major issues of the early 1960s. The first visual instance of the Berlin Wall on Der Spiegel did not appear until 1962. The cover featured the image of a guardsman standing in front of the Berlin Wall with the cover line “Flucht Durch die Mauer” [Escape through the Wall]. The second appearance of the Berlin Wall on Der Spiegel was in 1989 on Issue 46 (Figure 10), which followed the fall of the wall. On the cover, Germans are taking the destruction of the Berlin Wall into their own hands, as one man is chipping away at the graffiti-covered barrier with an ax. This image of Germans attacking the wall signifies the change in attitude of Germans who once feared showing pride in their country but who are now embracing their united strength and newly attained freedom to cross the border once more, as emphasized by the cover lines “Offene Grenzen” [Open Borders] and “Freie Wahlen” [Free Votes]. The physical act of Germans breaking down the barrier indicates their desire and need for change. The cover shows the Germans literally breaking through those negative emotions and conveying a new attitude of unity and pride.

After Issue 46 (Figure 10), there was an increasing presence of flags as well as the coat of arms on Der Spiegel’s covers. There was a particularly strong presence of the GDR coat of arms leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Yet the covers of 1990 also marked the presence of the German currency. Several covers around this time featured political figures who often referenced the loss of state money, particularly as concerns over losing the D-mark as the currency in Germany evolved.
Despite the initial uncertainties surrounding the introduction of the euro, Germany, more specifically Der Spiegel, embraced the major change. This is evident on the cover of Issue 1 from 2002 (Figure 11), on which the euro is portrayed as the sun rising above the world, accompanied by the words, “Euroland: Die neue Geldmacht” [Euroland: The New Financial Power]. The euro coin is depicted in a positive light, shining on the European continent and symbolizing the unifying effect of the euro across Europe. Just as the rising sun marks the start of a new day, the way in which the euro is presented signifies the beginning of a new era in economic cooperation among the European countries.

Although the appearance of the German flag on Der Spiegel was infrequent in 2006, certain covers exuded a form of German pride, including the cover relating to the 2006 World Cup. From flags waving in the air to color-coordinated clothing in the spirit of Germany, Issue 25 from 2006 (Figure 12) encourages support of Germany’s soccer team. The multitude of country flags in black, red, and yellow across the cover marks a new form of German pride that presented itself during the 2006 World Cup. Germans took pride in their identity, celebrating “Die Deutschland Party” [The Germany Party] as written across Issue 25. The cover shows not only that Germans were proudly flying their flag but also that people from other nations were celebrating along with the reemergence of German patriotism—an image visually extending beyond the red border on the cover, emphasizing the effect on other parts of the world.
From featuring a new chancellor to highlighting the major achievements of a political party leader, the covers that were classified as patriotism often depicted political figures in a positive manner. By printing photos of politicians in a positive light, such as looking particularly friendly, professional, or thoughtful, Der Spiegel revealed a sense of pride in Germany’s politicians. For example, Issue 15 from 1961 (Figure 13) features a close-up photo of the newest leader of the Christian Social Union (CSU) political party at the time, Franz Josef Strauss, looking particularly happy. Compared with the 1960s, the later covers often portrayed political figures in relation to other symbols, such as the flag or the coat of arms, or with a politician from a different party. Yet, similar to 1959, many of the later covers revealed a sense of patriotism by depicting politicians in a positive way. The later covers, however, also presented more visual instances of the German flag and national colors.

While certain covers depicted an image of the flag spread across the entire page, the flag was typically pictured in the context of a specific theme or topic, for example printed on the diaper of a toddler. Issue 52 from 1989 (Figure 14) depicts a flag in the shape of a ribbon wrapped around the Brandenburg Gate. The flag highlights the historic monument that represents German history and also the unveiling of a new, reunited Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall.
Unlike the flag, which was often displayed in varying contexts, the national colors were commonly used for one particular design element, as part of the cover lines. At times the German colors were not immediately apparent but nonetheless helped emphasize the meaning behind the cover image while alluding to German pride. For example, on Issue 44 from 1989 (Figure 15), the national colors are spread out across the cover. The black is symbolized by the darkness of night, and the yellow and red are exhibited within the main headline “Volk Ohne Angst” [People Without Fear]. The combination of the cover line and the crowd marching in unison reiterates the people’s collaborative efforts as an East German community fighting for its democratic rights in the GDR before the fall of the Berlin Wall. The colors and the cover line stress the common bond among the crowd members, namely their German national identity. The blurred image of the German government building depicted beneath the cover line places emphasis on the people and their unified fight for their rights.

While certain covers of Der Spiegel portrayed a strong sense of patriotism, the coat of arms rarely appeared on the covers and usually consisted of the Weimar eagle without the traditional yellow background. When the coat of arms did appear, the German eagle at times represented strength and valor, as seen on Issue 26 from 1991 (Figure 16). The Weimar eagle is perched on the Brandenburg Gate with the words “Der deutsche Kraftakt” [GermanFeat of Strength] printed across the top. Although not a direct reference to the Weimar period, the cover nevertheless emphasizes the perception of the coat of arms in Berlin since reunification. The symbol represents historical changes in Germany and what it could mean for East and West Germans if Berlin were to become the capital of Germany. Although the cover symbolizes a sense of uncertainty for the future of Germany, the Weimar eagle is nevertheless a positive force behind the meaning of the cover.
Each of the covers leading up to the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall on Issue 45 from 2009 (Figure 17) revealed certain aspects of Germany, whether it was the reemergence of German pride surrounding a major soccer tournament or a newly defined identity after the crumbling of the Berlin Wall. While the photos on the covers alone shed light on the issues surrounding the four chosen major events in Germany, it was the design with the specific cover lines and overall layout that helped symbolize the meaning of patriotism and national identity for East and West Germans in a reunified Germany.

**Conclusion**

While the earlier *Der Spiegel* covers that were considered patriotic focused on influential politicians, there was an increasing use over time of the flag, national colors, and symbols identified as “other.” At first, there was hardly any appearance of patriotism on *Der Spiegel’s* covers, particularly in 1947. The reason for the lack of patriotism might be due to Fulbrook’s (1999) belief that expressing any forms of patriotism in Germany after the Nazi era was impossible. The cover that appeared most patriotic from the four events pertained to the 2006 World Cup, which showed dozens of flags. This supports the initial expectation that the international soccer match dramatically changed the way in which patriotism was viewed and portrayed in Germany, particularly on the cover of *Der Spiegel*.

Although the meaning of patriotism has greatly progressed since *Der Spiegel* was first published, in 1947 German pride was portrayed through the representation of major political figures. As a result, national identity in Germany in 1947 primarily rested on what each of the political figures signified for Germany. Therefore, German pride was associated with the positive changes that politicians were attempting to instill in a country still recovering from the repercussions of war. The year 1989 marked a significant change in the way *Der Spiegel* portrayed national pride, particularly through the increasing presence of the flag, national colors, and symbols coded as “other.” 2006, the year of the World Cup in Germany, was a key year for Germans and their view of patriotism, as spectators at the stadium were proudly flying the German flag. Contrary to research that shows the media often portray themes of patriotism in a time of crisis (Skitka, 2005), the patriotism symbols were strongly represented during a positive event—the 2006 World Cup.
The change in the use of symbols through *Der Spiegel*’s cover designs represented the evolving feelings of patriotism through imagery as well as the perception of national identity in relation to the four major events. Compared with the patriotism symbols, there were, in general, a greater number of symbols of national identity between 1947 and 2009. The presence and role of national identity depended on the issues surrounding each event in Germany. The Berlin Wall signified the strong differences in the way East and West Germans perceived national identity. The building of the Berlin Wall resulted in the development of two forms of German identity: East and West German. While the building of the Berlin Wall signified a torn concept of national identity in a recently divided nation, East and West Germans began to face a new dilemma of identity with the fall of the Berlin Wall, thereby resulting in the strong presence of symbols that represented how Germany felt about its national identity.

One of the major findings of this study was the increase in the combination of patriotism and national identity symbols after two of the four key events: the building of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany. The increase in symbols surrounding the reunification of Germany was due to the positive effect that the fall of the Berlin Wall had on Germany, as East Germany and West Germany were once again a whole nation. This event signified a turning point for Germany, as East and West were not physically and emotionally restricted by the past but were rather revealing a positive view of the future of Germany, as expressed on the covers of *Der Spiegel*. On the other hand, while the building of the Berlin Wall also showed an increase in symbols before versus after the event, there were few patriotism symbols associated with this event. The national identity symbols were portrayed in a negative way, as *Der Spiegel* was openly expressing criticism toward Germany and its leaders. This reveals that some events can affect how a nation perceives itself. More specifically, certain events can influence how the media present images of patriotism and national identity to audience. In turn, the events affected how *Der Spiegel* depicted patriotism and national identity on its covers, thereby reflecting how Germany defined itself and expressed a sense of national pride following each event.

This study recognized that a cover establishes themes of commonality, nationality, and pride. Yet the cover entails far more than just words and a photo printed on a page. Thus, visuals can influence a reader just as strongly as the written text (Kim & Kelly, 2007). *Der Spiegel* used similar concepts and representations of symbols that reflected the effective use of visuals and the perception of patriotism and national identity in Germany at the time. For example, for covers featuring a key politician, *Der Spiegel* used headshot photos of the political figure as a means of creating an up-close and personal approach to portraying the person. This was especially the case for the earlier covers. Although readers tend to easily remember visually familiar images even more than words (Lester, 2005), it is the grouping of design elements on the cover that draws the curiosity of the readers to discover the meaning behind the cover lines and intriguing cover photo.
The current study supports the idea that a magazine can embody the voice of a nation (Johnson & Prijatel, 2007). The fact that Der Spiegel employed various symbols to portray its nation was essential for the way it viewed Germany (Inthorn, 2007) and depicted preconceived notions of national identity. In addition, the patriotism and national identity symbols revealed the magazine’s efforts to emphasize the value of being German or, echoing Inthorn (2007), revealed the importance of membership within a nation.

Although sources like Fulbrook (1999) and Burbank (2003) argued that Germans are reluctant to show pride in their nation, Beard (2006) claimed that Germany is becoming more accepting of patriotism. Nevertheless, the current study supported Inthorn’s (2007) statement that the image and meaning of patriotism continue to develop in Germany. This is shown through the increasing use of symbols, including the flag, and the visual variations in the way the images are portrayed on the covers of Der Spiegel.

This study revealed strong support for the idea of visuals as framing devices on magazine covers. Through the media, individuals learn about other parts of the world and about issues pertaining to their own community, including how they relate to their fellow citizens. The results confirmed that magazine covers are more than just promoters of the news. They are colorful forms of journalistic expressions that depict the way we view the world and ourselves.

References


