

**DESIGN AND AESTHETIC ANALYSIS OF PAKISTANI  
STAMPS FOR THE POSITIVE IMAGE OF PAKISTAN  
IN WORLD**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Pakistan is the country rich in cultural treasures, having ancient monuments to contemporary wonders. Postage stamps being called as silent ambassadors contribute to improve image of a country. Pakistan Post Office is one of the oldest government organizations in the Sub-Continent, designing and dealing in stampage of Pakistan. This study was aimed at to find out the factors in postal stamps design that contribute to enhance the positive image of Pakistan in world. The study is quantitative in nature based on aesthetic design theory and the findings of the study reflected that if balance, symmetry, colors, aesthetics, breathing space, harmony and eye movement incorporated properly and aesthetically in postal designs it can support to improve image of Pakistan worldwide. Findings from this study can be applied by the concerned authorities to take concrete measures for improving stamp design to enhance image of Pakistan globally.*

**Keywords:** *Postal Stamps, Design Theory, Image of Pakistan, Stamp Iconography images, National identity, Visualization*

## **Introduction and background**

Pakistan is that part of world rich in culture and heritage, most importantly inhabited with beautiful versatile people, and much more extraordinary splendor to show to world. Postage stamps are face of a country; these are small documents with illustrations represent what a country possesses. Ashraf (2013) studied that Pakistan is the most misinterpreted country in the world and the phenomenon of terrorism and religious extremism, arguably, is a foremost factor in distorting its image in international world. Pakistan as a front line country in the war on terror has compromised its image a lot. The aim of this research study is to investigate as how the image of Pakistan can be constructed through postage stamps of Pakistan. Doubleday and Isani (1993) emphasized that postage stamps are moving identity of a country, territorially grounded but mostly its visual representation is not rendered aesthetically in Pakistan. The use of stamps and its rotation to different parts of world gives them significant nation building power. Raento and Brunn (2005) agreed that by focusing on the socially constructed visual qualities of stamps, it is discussed that postal stamps importance as political, socio-cultural and territorially specific texts offers valuable visions into the evolution and representation of the publishing country.

Zahedi and Jamal (1997) stated that postage stamps of Pakistan are those issued since Pakistan's independence in 1947. Pakistan Post has published more than 600 series, which makes more than 1300 stamps. They further added that the postage stamp, first issued in England in 1840, has changed over the time and also served another function, that is the use of the postage stamp as advertising element and propaganda both local and international having themes ranging from nationalism, history, politics, economics, art, culture, heritage and many others. The Pakistani stamps depict a wide range of themes, layouts having different design characteristics. Postage stamps have to be within a set of fairly strict design constraints. Almost all of the stamps

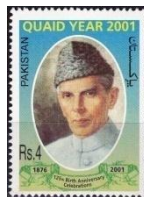
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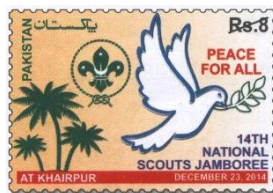
have the name of the issuing country in their layout, with image or illustration, year and monetary value of the stamp. There are no official limitations on shape or size, most stamps are rectangular in shape, and the measurements are no more than 1¼ inches in width.

Andersen (2006) reported after Pakistan came into being, the new government overprinted British Indian stamps to continue the postal system in Pakistan. The usage of postage stamps in Asia dates back to 1852. Postage stamps in Pakistan have different themes. Postage stamp graphic design generally falls into one of four types:

**Portraiture** is the postage stamps feature a portrait of either a ruler or statesman as a significant part of the design layout. This is one of the most common type in Pakistan and have a crucial role in stamp designing. It has been expanded to include cultural figures and other notable individuals.



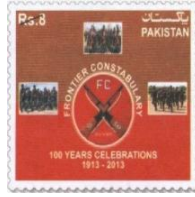
**Pictorials** are the ones that include wide range of themes; from important events in the country's history to some of its remarkable innate flora and wildlife. This is also the reason that theses type of stamps has the widest range of design possibilities. Many philatelic catalogues show that a lot of most appealing designs fall into this category of stamps.



**Emblems** are the type that includes a country's official symbols, flag and other iconography.

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**Numericals** are the least common type of stamp is a stamp with the denomination as the main design element. As there is no picture or illustration involved so can be challenging for designer to make it more appealing with just typography.



Apfelbauminc design agency (2006) studied that every country has its own set of guidelines for stamp graphic designing. These decisions are mostly practical according to stamp, like use of different colors to signify different money value on stamps. Also changes are the result of historical and political developments over time.

Pakistan Post (2017) in their website stated that it is one of the oldest departments in Pakistan. After independence, it began operating as postal and telecommunications department. In 1962 it started working independently. The department of Pakistan Post has approximately 13,000 post offices providing postal services throughout country. 20 million houses and businesses are getting delivery services from Pakistan Post at lowest prices. In addition to its traditional role, Pakistan Post is also performing the services like savings banks, postal life insurance, tax, and utility bills. The Advanced Postal Regulatory Commission was established through the 2002 Regulations of the Pakistan Postal Administration Board. Administration of postal services and related services is divided into three levels: circle level, regional level and district level. Each division is headed by a postmaster and extends its territorial authority to one

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region. In performing his duties, the postmaster General is assisted by the district-level postal chief and unit officer at the operational level.

Choudhary (2006) studied that Pakistan issue postage stamps that represent variety of themes are designed to honor number of personalities, national and international societies and events, the Pakistan's flora and wild life, its development and cultural and ancient legacy. The other common themes uses on Pakistani postal stamps are education, defense, religion and sports.

Zahedi (1997) stated that the picture of Quaid Azam was first used on stamp in 1966 on his 90th birth anniversary, before that his quotes and his mausoleum was used on stamps. After that number of stamps has been published carrying his picture like his 50th death anniversary in 1998 and in 2001 on the occasion of his 125<sup>th</sup> birthday. Many local and international personalities like Abdus Salam , Mirza Ghalib, Allama Iqbal , Shah of Iran, Kemal Atatürk, Maria Montessori, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Hakim Saeed, Liaquat Ali Khan, ,Tipu Sultan are illustrated on stamps after 1960. Series of stamps which is the largest ever in Pakistan, issued was consisted of 27 stamps having Pakistan's freedom movement pioneers. Over the years, various series have been periodically issued. There is no set basis for the issuance of stamps and these are released at the discretion of the authorities. Stamps famous series include themes like Fruits of Pakistan, Handicrafts, Moenjodaro, Poets of Pakistan and Wildlife.

Siddiqui Stamps Catalogue (2011) stated that over 60 years, Pakistan has issued over 600 issues and 1,100 stamps. There are two types of stamps; one is regular stamps or distinctive stamps and the other type is the commemorative stamps which are designed specially on some event or occasion of national level.

Now talking about the aesthetics of design for stamp, a term “aesthetics” has evolved through the years, studied from different viewpoints and has different meanings for different schools of thought. In this study, we will discuss few aspects of aesthetics which serve as a background for our study. There are certain design principles which are used to determine the fact that the design is aesthetically better or not. These characteristics include types of picture, photography, illustration used, breathing space, color contrast, legibility and readability of design, alignments, balance, and harmony and eye movement. In this study, the stamps designed in Pakistan are aesthetically analyzed according to these principles to determine whether a stamp design is of that quality which attract viewers eye and can contribute to create positive image internationally.

### **Problem Statement**

Postage stamps are face of a country; these are small documents with illustration represent what a country possesses. Therefore the phenomenon needs to be addressed carefully that Pakistani postal design is appropriate and attracts its audience as well as it is important to study the design characteristics needed to make postal stamps more effective visually, so that it can contribute in positive representation of Pakistan in world.

### **Literature Review**

The number of different design and visual images cited by Altman (1991) is phenomenal. Approximately 600 different stamps are issued in the world "entities" or "authorities", with stamps estimated at 250,000 different designs for the past century and a half. Moreover, the pace of new designs seems to be getting faster and faster, with around 10,000 different stamps issued worldwide in the recent year. Almost every captivating theme and image appears on stamps, as well as various open forms, styles and themes. Due to the range of printing methods and layouts, the number of different varieties has increased. Some technical problems have been solved, and

developed countries have also improved their stamp designs in recent years though errors, mistakes, and aesthetic disasters are there. Brunn (2011) explained that well-designed stamps are means for circulating the symbols and most importantly symbols of national identity and unity. Because they are everywhere, the average person deals with stamps more than any other government tool. However, the signature characteristics of stamps often change as compared to the design of coins and banknotes, which allows for various images and information. The simplest symbol of national identity is the national flag, which appears on many stamps in almost all countries.

Occasionally, the appearance is so minimalist and simple that instead of using image of flag, it just has the national colors of the country. For example, from the time of the transition from the Brazilian Empire to the Republic, the significance of the national flag on the stamp became evident. With the departure of Dom Pedro II, the last emperor of 1889, the stamps of the New Republic devised new symbols of the national identity associated with the past rather than the emblems of the empire Relationship. Brazil's green and yellow ethnic colors did indeed bring about the victory and achievements of army and navy. In order to defend the motherland, these colors, which are independent of the government, represent the permanent status of Brazil in other countries. The Republic of New Zealand stamps carry the green and yellow national flags, with slogan "Ordem e Progresso" and twenty-one stars representing the twenty states and special cities of the Republic Star of Rio de Janeiro. Officials set out guidelines for these designs, providing that stamps that do not meet these specifications are illegal and cannot be used for postage.

Child in 2005 called, "Philately" as a major tourism category involving major sporting events such as the Olympic Games and World Cup football. Prior to that date, the host country of

any such occasion will focus on philately in order to publicize it to arouse national and international attention. Teams or individuals who win medals usually get honor to appear on stamps. Over time, even those countries that are not even associated with the event produce stamps for the interests of philatelists.

A survey by Novedades (2002) shows that the U.S. government uses stamps as a means of promoting a good image of its own country. Sometimes this supports valuable organizations such as the Red Cross, Scouts, Lions clubs, Rotary Clubs, hospitals and more. These stamps are occasionally issued with additional fees and may be passed on to the organization. There are numbers of stamps that have been issued to persuade people to adopt healthy lifestyles through exercise. The Argentine stamp is a warning about AIDS, shocking many conservative and traditionalists. A campaign was launched on postal stamps by the new administration of Vicente Fox in 2002 against corruption by officials, including officials from the police station to the highest levels of government, the messages on the stamps was for more honest management, no more bribe and corruption. These stamps also announce the "Code of Federal Public Service Ethics."

Peter (1989) and Vatorella (1990) argue that well-designed layouts are recognizable, meaningful and have a positive impact. Bloch (1995) studied that good stamp design ideas can lead to likeness; they can evoke a more intense aesthetic response. Aesthetic reactions are formed in response to the basics of stimuli, involving a strong focus and involvement. While a strong aesthetic response may be more associated with art, especially resonant design can have a strong emotional response among consumers. Schmitt and Simonson (2003) further elaborate that as aesthetics evolves as an important part of corporate marketing, it is important to determine the extent to which design elements have a positive impact.



Henderson et al. (2003) & Henderson and Cote (1998) discussed in their study the importance of the visual interest and likeability for stamps. The concept of visual transferability has been supported by the cultural consistency of design responses. Collett et al. (2002) argue that the visual features of design can be well transnational. For example, Schmitt and Simonson (2003) suggest that some cultures have a more pronounced preference for certain manifestations. The angular shapes that may be associated with conflicts may be a poor choice in culture, where harmony has great value. Old studies also show the attraction and beauty is important to attract eye of the viewer. Koffka (1962) quoted Gestalt psychology as saying that good design is dictated by cultural beliefs such as rhythm, symmetry, unity and harmony between elements, and beauty is part of culture, not individual. Malhotra and Mangrulkar (2001) studies confirm the impact of national culture on organizational marketing. Hofstadter's (1994) model helps to explain the values and aesthetic preferences of marketing in different cultural contexts. For example, perspectives are related to conflict, vitality and masculinity. Roundness is associated with harmony, softness and femininity. Henderson et al (2003) explain that symmetry is most emphasized in collectivist societies, whereas individualist societies tend to have more anti-traditional, creative expressions. Lewicki (1988) states that some preferences appear to be natural or at least early in life in contrast to the design preferences held by literary-based literature. The balance between natural design preferences is especially important. Theologians Mayall (1986) and Papanek (1984) argue that humans have a strong preference for the forms that embody nature and organic principles. Whatever their point of view, there is evidence to support the cross-cultural aesthetic preferences of artificially constructed (Williams, 1981) divine proportions in the natural environment (Doczi, 1981). Gestalt theory is not a set of visual principles that all designers apply uniformly. Certain laws identified in Gestalt theory can help

design visually appealing. They deal with balance / symmetry, continuity, closure, persona, focus, homogeneity correspondence, proximity, similarity, simplicity, and unity / harmony. Fisher et al. (1998-99) study that if the visual object is unbalanced or not symmetrical, the visual object will appear incomplete. When the visual "weight" is evenly placed on both sides of the shaft, a psychological balance or balance can usually be achieved. Fultz (1999) quotes eye movement as the instinctive behavior of the eye to follow directions derived from visual design. Each visual presentation needs to be focused by the eye movement in the design, known as a focal point or focus. Chang and Nesbitt (2006) explained about focal point that it draws the audience's attention and convinced the audience to further track the visual information, and reaching the most important part that is message of the design. In good design elements it seems that the surface is extended from the other elements and attracting attention to the important elements of the design. They further discuss that harmony in design means that there is consistency or combination among the elements of the design; they look as if they are together, there is visual connection bringing them together. If the related objects do not appear in the same form, the observer may think that the visual design of the subject that is not relevant to the major may cause confusion. The items on the layout can be adjusted to achieve a visual balance and harmony.

### **Methodology**

Survey method was employed and close ended questionnaire instrument was used. By using purposive sampling technique three departments of design were selected from three private universities based in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. 100 questionnaires were equally distributed among the students of design of the three universities. The design students were asked to rate series of postal stamps. The series was issued on a 01 January, 2017, on the event of

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International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development – 2017. This series is a Commemorative Postage Stamps series. The questionnaire was prepared by using some of the Gestalt design principles that are color contrast, harmony, balance, breathing space, alignments and focal point in text and typography.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Given stamp series for analysis**

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<b>Questions</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
1. Is photography used in the series of stamps are appealing to eye?	5	95	0
2. Is there any breathing space in the given set of stamps?	4	91	5
3. Do you think contrast of colors used are attractive to eye?	6	94	0
4. Do you think layout is noticeable and easy to read?	8	92	0
5. Are alignments used are composed and neatly grouped?	11	88	1
6. Is the design of the stamps creating balanced layout?	5	90	5
7. Is there harmony between colors and other elements of design?	3	94	3
8. If the movement of the eye is from more emphasized part to less emphasized part of the design of stamps?	3	96	1
9. Do you think on basis of aesthetics of design and innovation, these designs need improvement?	98	2	0
10. Do you think designs of these stamps can create positive image of Pakistan when exposed internationally?	6	91	3

The aesthetics and design features of stamps can win attention and respect of the viewer, as well-designed stamps represent the creative efforts of one or more specialists who must carefully reconcile with many controversial factors: the legal requirements for the stamp exhibit to be prepaid, How much postage; country of origin; typesetting; graphic elements (since almost all stamps now have a certain image); and useful and appealing artistic expressions that work in very small spaces. In order to convey a powerful visual statement in this small two-dimensional space, successful designers must use contrast and color as well as typography and symbols to

convey the message. In other words, designers must comply with the Universal Postal Union's requirements for the identification of countries' index symbols, specifying that the nominal value of stamps, combined with any iconic or symbolic element, is required.

First question was if photography used in the series of stamps in Pakistan are appealing to eye or not. Result shows that 95% design students agreed that photography used in the given stamps are not appealing to eye, and hardly can help to catch attention of the viewer. This has been proven by many studies as well that for good design compositions aesthetical and quality pictures are very important. Like Harrower & Elman (1995) quoted in their study that good photography plays great role in making an appealing graphic layout that attracts audience attention and help to absorb the message well. Similarly Chang Chen (2009) stated that professional photography and suitable image representations are necessary to design a good composition layout.

The next question of was if there any breathing space in the given set of stamps. Result shows that 91% design students think that breathing space has not been used in the given stamps. According Tondreau (2009), the use of breathing space is a conscious design decision to give the viewer's eye pause and help them absorb the design well. According to many design researches breathing space or negative space has been given importance when it comes to successful and composed design. Wong (2011) said that breathing space is actually 'the lungs of a good design'. That is the reason breathing space is an essential part of a good design, which is lack by these stamp designs.

Then it was asked from the sample if they think contrast of colors used in given stamps are attractive to eye. Result shows that 94% of design students think that in the given stamp design, the color contrast is not appealing to eye. Color contrast add appeal to any design, it

make design more vibrant and attractive, if contrasting and complementary colors are used in a design, the elements which are needed to give emphasis can stand out (Schenker, 2005). Similarly, Graham (2012) also explored that contrast is an essential design value that should be a part of every effective layout, as good color contrast helps organize design, hence grab the attention of viewer.

About layout of the design, it was asked that if they think layout is noticeable and easy to read. Result shows that according to 92% of our respondents, that information on the stamp is not clear and readability of the text is very low. Hill and Scharff (1997) explained that legibility and readability in any design layout is very important for efficient communication. Study of Plaisant, Grosjean, and Bederson (2002) stated that good design provides content in such a way that is legible and readable.

Regarding alignments of the design, it was questioned that if alignments used in given stamps are composed and neatly grouped. 88% of the design students agreed that alignments used in the given stamps are not aligned and composed. Martin (2011) quoted that alignments in a design help to create a visual connection between elements of one design, hence make a unified and composed design. Hortin (2009) explained alignments are used to compose the design, to reduce the clutter and messy effect which comes when there are too many elements in a design. Alignments are very crucial principle of design. It brings order and organization in design.

Szabo and Kanuka (1999) also stated that it's not necessary that elements are of the equal size. Balance can be achieved by placing heavy element at one area of layout and other light elements on the other area of the design. So for balanced design it was inquired from sample that is the design of the stamps creating balanced layout or not. Result shows that 90% of design students agreed that design of the stamps is not balanced. Hortin (2009) explained that

balance brings constancy and structure to layout. It is the emphasis given to design by the placement of elements.

For harmony between colors and other elements of stamp design, 94% of the respondents think that there is no harmony between colors and other elements of stamp designs. Tokumaru, Muranaka and Imanishi (2002) studied about the importance of harmony in design and explained that design is about creating harmony among the elements by composing them together in a final design that is explicitly appealing. According to Hutcheson (1973), the viewer can be more attracted toward design if the proper combination and harmony is used between colors, typography, tones and visual elements.

Another question was if the movement of the eye is from more emphasized part to less emphasized part of the design of stamps, or there any focal point in design and result shows that 96% of design students believes that there's no sense eye movement from high emphasize area to less emphasized area in given stamp designs. A study by Bradley (2014) shows that eye movement in a design determines a focal point and gives the idea that where viewer should start and finish viewing the design. A good design is visually connected in a way that gives eye a movement from more important part of the design to less important. It actually helps viewer's eye moves from one point to the next at a glance and important principle of an effective design. Then on basis of aesthetics of design and innovation if audience think, these designs need improvement or not. 98% of the design students responded that given designs of the stamps should be improved aesthetically; this will help creating positive image of our country in right way. It is also explained by a study of (Hekkert, 2006) that aesthetically good design creates good effect on the senses of the viewer.

Last question was regarding if stamps can create positive image of Pakistan when exposed internationally. Result shows that 91% of the future designers think that these stamps are not aesthetically qualified to create positive image in international world. Raento and Brunn (2005) studied that postal stamps contains considerable nation building power and are classic tools of what Michael Billig says ‘banal nationalism’ and if they are design with good aesthetics one can imagine the power they can bring to create the positive image of our country.

### **Conclusion**

Stamps are icons for promoting country image internationally and well balanced elements and well-designed stamps are crucial. Postal stamps are created by government of Pakistan, so government should emphasize on improving the aesthetical design of postal stamps. Country stamps represent culture, value and assets of a nation. Postage stamps are government products, if government is given opportunity to young designers and students, most appealing stamps can be produced, as our study was conducted from design students, who will be future designers and wholly realize that what the impact of good design for our country is. The result recommends that stamp issuing authorities should focus on the better and aesthetic designs, so that our culture, heritage and customs are portrayed beautifully which eventually will create positive impact in international world, also will impact tourism and will bring progressive change in economy. Pakistan is indeed an amazing country with beautiful hearted people and this should portrayed in aesthetical way on moving paintings, that are the postal stamps of Pakistan.



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