Uncle Sam Wants You!:
A Content Analysis of Patriotic Symbolism in Military Recruitment Posters

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Abstract

This content analysis of one hundred and twenty-six military recruitment posters analyzes how patriotic imagery and symbolism are represented in recruitment posters. This study looks at various themes that emerged in the data, such as honor, respect, and American symbols. Overall, recruitment posters were less likely to utilize national symbols but more likely to encourage recruits to join the military to gain honor and respect.

The United States Military has often been considered one of the largest and most capable militaries in the World. This position of capability was formerly held by England due to the power of their Navy, but once the Colonies won their independence in the American Revolution of 1775, the United States military proved to be valuable for protection of the country and has continued to do so through a series of wars over the past 250 years. However, while the mission of every branch of the military has remained the same over the years, the motives for engagement in war have changed. Involvement in wars has been a result of either a direct attack on civilians on American soil or as aid in solving turmoil in other countries. The reason for involvement for each war also influences the perception the American public holds towards the war. As both World War II and the Iraq war were the result of an attack on American soil, these two wars will be the focus of this study.

In order to have a capable military, there must be citizen support so that military branches have sufficient personnel. One way the military did this was through the use recruitment posters to attract young men and women to join a military force. This study focuses on how recruitment posters use different themes to recruit individuals, with emphasis on the use of patriotic symbolism. The recruitment posters not only reflect the attitudes of the military branch, but also are an indicator for the general sentiment of society. By analyzing recruitment posters, this study will examine how patriotic symbolism varies between World War II and the Iraq war.

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of the American Military: WWII and Iraq

While the styles of fighting have changed, the American armed forces have been mystified and symbolized since the dawn of the American Revolution. As Kohn (1981) argues, a person in the United States Armed Forces was a special individual of society in which patriotism motivated him to enlistment. Military personnel were the epitome of American society, and represented the values on which America was founded. American soldiers, airmen, seamen, and marines were brave and courageous on the battlefield and remained true to their country, but despite the hardships of war, they returned home happy, almost as if nothing had changed (Kohn 1981). These beliefs have remained a part of American social thought because the foundation of the country was based on moral values which played into the drive citizens have to serve in the military to show their bravery, loyalty, virtue, and strength both on the battlefield and in civilian life (Kohn 1981). Thus, the armed forces were to represent the loyalty and patriotism that flooded the country during times of great despair.

Patriotism and the Media

In order to gain support for World War II, the United States employed the use of newsreels. Between 1942 and 1946, the United States Office of War Information produced 267 newsreels called "United News" (Ancestry.com 2007). These ten-minute clips were shown in movie theatres every week, which was often enough to become a vital tool for Americans to use to monitor war efforts (Universal 2001). The newsreels

created a meaning of the war for Americans at home along with a pseudo reality of the war (Hagopian 2007). Lane (1998) found that the limited images of battles and bloodshed allowed Americans to accept the media's portrayal of the war as positive and heroic. Thus, the perception the American public had of the war contributed to the ever-growing war effort. Hagopian (2007) found that the propaganda campaigns produced by the United States Office of War Information were a factor that helped win the war through increased production, labor and conservation by American citizens and workers. The support from Americans at home was a significant factor in the Allied success. The media created by the government throughout the war reinforced the construction of the Axis powers as evil, which was crucial to the enlistment rates of the American military (Hagopian 2007).

As a result of the advancements in media technology, there have been no newsreels during Operation Iraqi Freedom, 'Iraq War'. The information and propaganda surrounding the war have been widely available to the public. As a result, the media coverage of the Iraq War has been the closest and most widely reported war in military history (Schweikart 2006). Similarly, Quandt (2003) found that as early as March of 2003, there were over 775 embedded journalist and photographers with the troops. However, as with any news, the story is shaped by external factors. Ravi (2005) found that coverage of the war in American newspapers focused on the military strategy and the progress of the war rather than on public opinion about the war. In contrast, many other countries maintained their focus on public opinion. The government has not censored the information given to the public during the Iraq war in the same way it did during World

War II due to the Freedom of Information Act of 1966. Thus, the public is allowed to draw their own conclusions about the Iraq war so questions arise as to whether the recruitment that occurred in World War II differs from recruitment for the Iraq war.

Patriotism and the Military Recruit

As with any business, the goal of a marketing campaign is to determine the most effective means of attaining and retaining customers. In the case of the military, the goal of a recruitment campaign is to attain as many soldiers as possible. However, in World War II, the country used a draft in addition to active recruitment, whereas in the Iraq war, the military is an all-volunteer force. Therefore, for Padilla and Laner (2001), recruitment posters are meant to draw in potential recruits and encourage them to join a different lifestyle, one that includes new symbols, rules and requires a new identity. Their study looked at the ways in which recruitment posters attracted young men and women. They found that in World War I and II, the recruitment messages focused on themes of tradition and honor of military service. However, after the war, Padilla and Laner found a significant shift in recruitment messages to themes of social status improvement and financial improvement.

Hyder and Fugita (1993) conducted a study that looked at the retention rates of Reservists who served in Operation Desert Storm. They found that emotional factors such as love for one's country, camaraderie, sense of community and taste for military life played significant roles in motivating Reservists to remain in the service. In a similar study, Griffith (2008) analyzed the intentions of United States Army recruits in 2005 through surveys. He found that the four main reasons recruits joined the military were to

experience military life, gain occupational development, gain material benefits, and to

expand their future opportunities. Griffith argued that the soldiers who join for intrinsic

reasons were influenced by their social environment in and out of the military along with

their personal feeling of patriotism. More importantly, these soldiers saw themselves as

better equipped for combat than their counterparts who joined for extrinsic reasons

(Griffith 2008). A study done by Griffith and Perry (1993) during Operation Desert

Storm utilized the same procedure and yielded the similar results; occupational

development, material benefits, future opportunities and military life are the main

purposes that recruits join the military. These studies focused on recruits' personal

motivations for enlistment, but did not look at how external forces influence their

motivations. This study examines this gap in information to see how the government

attempts to motivate recruits to join the military as displayed in different forms of

recruitment propaganda.

THEORY

Social Construction of Reality

      Social theorists tend to operate under one of two schools of thought: Modernism

or Post-Modernism. Modernism rejected the existing traditional structures of social

institutions and created new ones to fit the newly emerging social relations of the

Industrial Revolution. It focuses around the notion that human rationality was vital to the

progress that took place in both science and technology. Modernity utilizes the idea that

progress will bring about a better society; however, "the first sign of the coming good

society was always, it seemed, the destruction or loss of something familiar and dear" (Lemert 2010:25). Modernity assumes a singular way of thinking in that it believed that there was a Truth, which left no room for opposing thoughts. By contrast, post-modernity opposes these very notions; it focuses around the idea that there is no universal truth that is valid for all aspects of society. Without a center or Truth, the implosion of boundaries that took place allowed the underlying uncertainties of modernism to surface. In post-modernity, multi-cultural social identities blurred the lines of modernity that caused conflicts in personal identities. It became more accessible for people to take on multiple identities, rather than singular identities pre-defined by societal norms.

In a social system like the military, in which the conservative traditions of power and a patriarchal structure of beliefs are deeply rooted, incorporating multiple identities is not always simple, especially for women. In order to have a capable military, there must be citizen support, and one way to achieve full citizen support is for the military to be representative of its country's population. To the untrained observer, the United States Military is a place where the soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines appear to be homogenous. Yet, at a closer look, the face of the military today is much different than that of the military seventy years ago. The purpose of this project is to analyze how the United States government constructs the concept of patriotism in recruitment posters of solders, sailors, airmen and marines and how it has changed from World War II to the Iraq War. However, in order to analyze the images, there must be an understanding of the reasons behind them. This section will analyze how the work of Berger, Luckmann and Hall, in respect to social construction of identity, apply to the depiction of patriotism in

recruitment posters. More precisely, while Berger and Luckmann create the basis for social construction, Hall discusses the concept in regards to national identity.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that humans are by nature, social creatures. Human interaction is required for society and social order to develop, and without this social interaction, there would be no human environment. Berger and Luckmann argue that in order to cope with the stress of everyday decision-making, people rely on habits. These habitualized actions contain meanings for the individual and thus serve to form the beginnings of the construction of reality. However, through mutual observation of customs, actions become institutionalized. Berger and Luckmann (1966) state, "Habitualization carried with it the important psychological gain that choices are narrowed… the most important gain is that each [member of society] will be able to predict the other's actions. Concomitantly, the interaction of both becomes predictable" (p. 53-57). The institutionalization of actions creates a norm within society, which validates certain actions while rejecting others.

A person does not need to understand the process of institutionalization, they just need to perceive and accept the actions and social interactions as reality. To ensure this, the institutionalized structure needs legitimation. This legitimation, or social universe, utilizes a set of beliefs that is widely accepted in order to make the structure plausible (1966).

However, part of legitimation is embodied in the concept of socialization. No person is born into a social group, but, through social interaction, they become a member of that society. Over time, the social interactions a person encounters will be internalized

to develop knowledge about societal roles. For Berger and Luckmann (1966), socialization is the process in which a person becomes a member of society and accepts the constructed reality of that society. Socialization is a continuous process, one that last the entirety of a person's life. Throughout the process of socialization, the identity and perception of self constantly evolve.

The social experiences of one's life construct their identity. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), once an identity is formed, it is maintained and reshaped by social interactions. The social structures in which the interactions fall determine the social identity. As a result, the social structure holds power over identities of people within the institution.

The Global, The Local, and the Return of Ethnicity

Stuart Hall builds on the theory of Berger and Luckmann to demonstrate how the national identity is a function of social construction. In "The Global, The Local and the Return of Ethnicity," Hall (1996) argues that a nation's identity can be used to unify a nation. Hall (1996) states, "National cultures construct identities by producing meanings about 'the nation' with which we can *identify*; these are contained in the stories which was told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it." (p. 603).

For Hall, there are different ways a nation represents itself. One way is through what he calls the narrative of the nation. This idea creates a shared story, with symbols and traditions that are salient in the society, is constructed by the society in order to create a foundation of a national identity. Formally, Hall (1996) defines this as "a set of

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stories, images, landscapes, scenarios, historical events, national symbols, and rituals which stand for, or represent, the shared experiences, sorrows and triumphs and disasters which give meaning to the nation" (p. 603). This story is shaped in such a way that it transcends time so that it creates a kind of literary tradition.

Another way a nation can represent their identity is through the invention of tradition. Hall (1996) defines this as "a set of practices…of a ritual or symbolic nature which seek to inculcate values and norms of behaviors by reputation which automatically implies continuity with a suitable historical past" (p. 604). Just as the story created a foundation for a national identity, it linked communities together so they can all share the same identity.

However, in the case of the United States, there are many different cultures all contributing to a larger national culture. In this, Hall questions the notion as to whether nations still have a national identity today. For him, national identity holds the power to reshape the symbols and rituals of a society; "A national culture has never been simply a point of allegiance, bonding and symbolic identification. It is also a structure of cultural power" (Hall 1996:605).

Social Construction theory is quite applicable today, especially in an analysis of advertisements. Advertisements not only sell a product, but also sell an idea that attracts consumers. When a concept such as patriotism is portrayed in advertisements, it creates an ideal for people to live up to, including the ideals presented in military advertising.

METHODOLOGY

  This study uses a content analysis of recruitment posters from every branch of the military. According to Neuman (2007:363), content analysis is "research in which one examines patterns of symbolic meaning within written text, audio, visual, or other communication medium." The posters will be analyzed based on different aspects of patriotism. For this study, patriotism will include any statement, symbol or image that references national identity. The concept was developed further as the data was coded.

Sample

  The sample was drawn from two different sources. For the World War II posters, the University of Minnesota War Posters Project was used and the posters from the Iraq war were gathered from online search engines. In order for a recruitment poster to be a part of this study, it must be commissioned by a branch of the United States Armed Forces, not a third party, and it must be released within the time frame of each respective war. This is essential because many social and political changes take place through the span of each war and this study is meant to analyze the governmental portrayal of patriotism rather than the opinions of other social groups.

  The total number of posters collected from World War II was 62 and there were 62 from the Iraq war. There were 28 posters for the Marines, 15 from World War II and 13 from the Iraq War. There were 45 for the Navy, 26 from World War II, 19 from the Iraq war. There were 45 from the Army, 21 from World War II and 24 from the Iraq war. There were 6 from the Air Force, all from the Iraq war since there was no distant military branch for the Air Force during World War II, instead they were divisions of the other

branches. Lastly, there were two posters from the U.S. Merchant Marines from World

War II.

Coding

Information that was coded included the branch each poster represented, the race

and gender of a character in the poster, the words used as propaganda and whether there

were any national symbols. The national symbols that were coded for were the colors red

white and blue, which was defined as an use of the three colors in any combination, stars

and stripes which was defined as the used of either the national flag or the imagery of

stars and strips, national monuments which was defined was any monument recognized

by the federal government, military symbols which was defined as any insignia used in

conjunction with military imagery, and lastly historical figures which was defined as any

culturally significant figure such as Uncle Sam or Lady Liberty. It should be noted that if

a poster included multiple national symbols, each individual symbol was coded. A copy

of the coding sheet is attached in the Appendix. The speech used in each poster was

coding according to the concept that emerged throughout the entire context of the poster.

The themes were defined after the coding was completed.

Strengths and Weaknesses

A content analysis of recruitment posters is a good method for this study, which

examines their change over time. In addition, the recruitment posters portray the

characteristics of patriotism for the ideal soldier, sailor, airman or marine the Department

of Defense is looking for in the military. This type of research will allow themes to

emerge, thus providing new insight into the reasons for any change in the depictions of

patriotism of the United States Armed Forces. In addition, it is a good method to use due

to the availability of information through the Internet. Saint Mary's has access to many

electronic databases, making access to the posters cost effective as well. This research

could easily be replicated by focusing on one or all periods of war.

One disadvantage to this method is that it is not likely that every recruitment

poster is obtainable through the Internet or through the Minnesota War posters project. It

is likely that the posters found online are the most popular and there will not be posters of

certain themes. With the posters in Minnesota War posters project, the posters are

targeted to a specific population. Thus, some posters will be excluded automatically.

Also, with any content analysis, there is a researcher bias since the items coded may not

always be noticed or attainable.

FINDINGS

The data collected from the recruitment posters illustrates a change in national

identity throughout the wars. The following charts show the findings with respect to

changes in the illustration of patriotism between World War II and the Iraq War.

The themes used to attract recruits were classified into six groups after the coding

was complete, as can be seen in Table 1. The first of these groups was honor/respect,

which was defined as any wording that conveyed the notion that the recruits would gain

more honor or respect for joining the military. The next group was revenge/protection,

which was defined as any theme that indicated that the recruit would be able to see

revenge for the attacks on the United States or provide protection for the country. The

third group was any wording that indicated that the recruit was more patriotic for joining

the military. The theme of personal reasons was defined as any indication that the recruit

should join the military for personal gain, such as income, housing, or camaraderie. The

next group was supporting roles, which was defined as any wording, which indicated that

the position the recruit would fill by joining the military was meant to support other areas

of the military such as nurses, mechanics or clerks. The last group was that of

necessity/belonging which was defined as themes, which indicated that, the recruit was

meant to be a part of the military.

Table 1: Comparison of Overall Themes in Words on Poster

	World War II	Iraq war	Total
Honor/respect	4(6.4%)	25(40.4%)	31 (24.6%)
Revenge/Protection	15 (24.2%)	13 (20.9%)	28 (22.2%)
American	17 (27.4%)	7 (11.3%)	24 (19.1%)
Personal	11 (17.7%)	8 (12.9%)	19 (15.1%)
Supporting Roles	9 (14.5%)	6 (9.7%)	15 (11.9%)
Necessity/belonging	6(9.7%)	3 (4.8%)	9 (7.1%)
Total	62	62	N=126

Table 1 shows that there was a significant change in themes from World War II to

the Iraq war. In World War II, the themes with the highest percentage were

Revenge/Protection (23.4 percent) and American (26.5 percent). Overall, the recruitment

posters in World War II attempted to attract new recruits through comments indicating

that the military would allow recruits to get revenge for their country or through appeals

to the recruits' national identity. By contrast, Necessity/Belonging (9.4 percent) and

Honor/Respect (9.4 percent) were the themes that appeared the fewest times. However, in the Iraq war, the most common theme was that of Honor/Respect (40.6 percent) and Revenge/Protection (20.9 percent), while the theme with the lowest percentage was Necessity/Belonging (4.8 percent).   In the Iraq war, recruitment posters used the concept of gaining honor and respect along with the notion of seeking revenge to gain new recruits.

Overall, there was an obvious relationship between the war and the themes that emerged, showing that the means of recruitment has changed over time. These findings may indicate that the military's understanding of attracting recruits has changed over time.

It should be noted that not all of the posters included national symbols or characters. The following table indicated the number of posters that included each attribute as well as the percentage of the total posters that utilized each attribute.

Table 2:

	World War II	Iraq war	Total
National Symbols/ Percentage	51	19	70
	51/62 (82.5%)	19/62	70/126
Character Appearance /Percentage	43	53	96
	43/62	53/62 (85.5%)	96/126
Characters in Action /Percentage	43	53	96
	43/62	53/62 (85.5%)	96/126
Total Posters	62	62	N=126

The following tables include information only for the subset of posters, which included national symbols or characters.

Looking at the subset of posters that included national symbols, themes emerge as can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3: Use of National Symbols in Recruitment Posters

	World War II	Iraq war	Total
Colors red white and blue	20 (39.2%)	3 (15.8%)	23 (32.9%)
Stars and Stripes	11 (21.6%)	7 (36.8%)	18 (25.7%)
Military symbols	7 (13.7%)	7 (36.8%)	14 (20.0%)
Historical figures	8 (15.7%)	1 (5.3%)	9 (12.8%)
National Monuments	2 (3.9%)	1 (5.3%)	3 (4.3 %)
Eagle	3 (5.9%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (4.3%)
Total	**51**	**19**	**n =70**

Table 3 shows that the use of national symbols differed greatly between the wars. World War II had a significantly higher depiction of national symbols. Out of the 64 from World War II, there were 51 (79.7 percent) instances where the poster included some sort of national icon. The most common symbol in World War II was the use of the colors red, white, and blue together. However, this is contrasted by the symbols in the Iraq War, where the most common symbols were the flag (36.8 percent), or stars and stripes, and military symbols (36.8 percent).

Another variable that was used to classify the recruitment posters was the dress of the characters in the poster. Looking at the subsets of posters that included characters, themes emerged, as can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Character Appearance

	World War II	Iraq war	Total
Work Uniform	18 (41.8%)	13 (24.5%)	31 (32.3%)
Combat Gear/Camis	11 (25.6%)	19 (35.8%)	30 (31.2%)
Formal Uniform	8 (18.6%)	15 (28.3%)	23 (24.0%)
Civilian clothes	4 (9.3%)	4 (7.5%)	8 (8.3%)
Other	2 (4.6%)	2 (3.8%)	4 (4.2%)
Total	43	53	n= 96

In World War II, the characters were more likely to be depicted wearing a work uniform (41.8 percent) and were very rarely shown wearing civilian clothes (9.3 percent). However, in the Iraq war, characters were shown wearing a combat uniform or camouflage (35.8 percent) the most and were also very rarely shown in civilian attire (7.5 percent). While not the majority, there was a significant shift in the number of times a character was shown in formal attire from World War II (18.6 percent) to the Iraq War (28.3 percent).

The last variable that was used to classify the posters was the position of the characters. This was classified into five categories: solitary movement (i.e standing, sitting, etc), in combat or preparing for combat, working in a non-combat setting, training, and at attention. Looking at the subset of posters that showed characters in action, themes emerged, as can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5: Characters in action

	World War II	Iraq war	Total
In Combat/ preparing	21(48.3%)	13 (24.5%)	34 (35.4%)
Solitary movement	13(30.2%)	15 (28.3%)	28 (29.2%)
At work (non-combat)	8(18.6%)	13 (24.5%)	21(21.8%)
Training	0 (0.0%)	7 (13.2%)	7 (7.3%)
At attention	1 (2.3%)	5 (9.4%)	6 (6.3%)
Total	43	53	n=96

The posters from World War II overwhelmingly represented the characters in situations of combat (48.3 percent) and almost never showed the characters standing at attention (2.3 percent). In contrast, the posters from the Iraq War evenly represented the characters in solitary movement (28.3 percent), in combat situations or preparing for them (24.5 percent) or at work in a non-combat situation (24.5 percent).

Overall, recruitment posters have changed over time. The posters are less likely to utilize national symbols but are more likely to encourage recruits to join the military to gain honor and respect.

DISCUSSION

By applying social construction theory to examine patriotic symbols in recruitment posters, several trends were found. Recruitment posters show a change over time regarding the cultural perception of the national identity of the United States and the differences in the posters reflect larger societal changes.

The findings show a difference in themes used to attract recruits. While the theme of seeking revenge or providing protection remained prevalent in the posters from both wars, there was an obvious shift from the 'American' in World War II to the theme of honor and respect in the Iraq war. It is not surprising that the theme of revenge and protection appeared the most in both wars because the reason the United States entered both wars was a result of a surprise attack made by the enemy on American soil. This is what Stuart Hall (1996) calls the *narrative of the nation*. Americans shared the experience of the attacks, as well as the sorrows, triumphs and disasters that accompanied the event, giving it meaning, which contributes to the collective identity of the nation. Utilizing the tragic events that precipitated the United States' involvement in each war may bring the country together, particularly the young population who are eligible for military service.

The findings showed that there was a fifteen percent decrease in the number of posters with an American theme from World War II to the Iraq war. However, there was a thirty-one percent increase in the numbers of posters with the theme of honor and respect in the same group of posters. It is likely this is a result of the events that took place during the period of time between the wars. Between 1944 and 2001, the United States experienced many social changes that reshaped the nation such as the civil rights movement. As increases in mediated images of war matter, these events shifted society from group ideals to individualistic ideals. It seems reasonable that this could be one of the reasons the theme changed from 'American', which is seemingly a group-oriented theme, to honor and respect, which is directed towards individual motivations.

The findings also demonstrated patterns with respect to the use of national symbols. From World War II to the Iraq War, there was a dramatic decrease in the number of national symbols used in recruitment posters. Perhaps this is indicative of a decrease in the strength in the American public's identification with the collective national identity. This could also be indicative of the public's association with subcultures, rather than the national culture.

Despite the limited number of national symbols in the posters from the Iraq war era, there was an overwhelming use of military symbols in Iraq-era posters. Perhaps the American public still identifies with the meaning a military insignia holds. However, the use of military symbols in conjunction with the theme of honor and respect strengthen this notion. Throughout American history, there has been a belief that the military is fighting for the good of the people. While this belief fluctuates, it still remains in the back of the minds of the American public. Perhaps, with both World War II and the Iraq war, the events that brought the United States into battle revived this belief and allowed the soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines to receive the same level of respect from society that they had experienced throughout the majority of American history, but had been not experienced in the Vietnam War.

The findings also show a link between how the characters in the posters were depicted and what activities they were performing. In the posters from World War II, the characters were shown in work uniforms either preparing for war (i.e. loading torpedoes or preparing planes) or in scenes of combat. Yet, in the Iraq War, the characters were depicted in combat gear or the camouflage uniforms at work in both non-combat and

combat environments. It should be noted that the majority of the posters portraying the characters in a position of solitary movement were wearing a formal uniform. Perhaps depicting the characters in war-like environments reinforces the actions of war. It also seems to reinforce the notion of the military fighting for something, namely the protection of free society.

If this project expanded, it would be beneficial to expand the sample size to include posters from other wars. By doing this, it would allow the researcher to see if there were any differences that took place between wars that began in different ways and how the public opinion of the war affected the posters. It would also be valuable to have a closer examination of the words used in the posters. For example, it might be more informative to code for specific words, rather than code for themes that occur in the entire poster.

Hall's theory of how a nation constructs its origins, traditions and rituals shows how recruitment posters construct the military to create a national identity. Recruitment posters are constructed in ways that relate the soldier, sailor, airmen, or marine to the citizens in which they vow to protect. By constructing the military personnel as protectors, it aims at increasing the support of the American public, which in turn reinforces the collective national identity.

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Appendix:
Coding Sheet:

Branch:

Occupation

Date of poster

Description

Characters (people in poster):

Race:

Gender:

Physical appearance:

Words on poster:

Themes:

Incentives for enlisting:

Family/Friendship mentioned:

(second coding): Key words/recurring words?

Icons:

National symbols shown:

Technology shown:

Setting: