

## ARTICLE

## Decoding Nazi antisemitic visual propaganda: A thematic analysis

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## Abstract

This article explores the profound influence of visual propaganda in Nazi Germany, focusing on its role in fostering antisemitic sentiments. By systematically analyzing 22 visual artifacts from Nazi propaganda, this study uncovers the key themes of dehumanization, economic manipulation, and political subversion that were instrumental in spreading hatred against Jews. The analysis demonstrates how these themes were strategically employed to desensitize the German populace to Jewish suffering, justify discriminatory policies, and mobilize public support for the Holocaust. The distribution and co-occurrence of these themes reveal a multifaceted approach, with a predominant focus on dehumanization paired frequently with political subversion to portray Jews as existential threats. This dual narrative was effective in normalizing violence and persecution. The study contextualizes these findings within existing literature on propaganda and highlights the enduring impact of these techniques on societal beliefs. The findings reveal that Nazi visual propaganda strategically employed themes of dehumanization, economic manipulation, and political subversion to instill antisemitic sentiments. Dehumanization was the most prevalent theme, often paired with political subversion, to depict Jews as both subhuman and political threats. Economic manipulation reinforced stereotypes of Jews as greedy and corrupt. These visuals effectively normalized hatred, justified discriminatory policies, and mobilized public complicity in the Holocaust.

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**Citation:** Jabarov J. Decoding Nazi antisemitic visual propaganda: A thematic analysis. *Arts & Communication*. 2026;4(2):025290069.  
doi: 10.36922/AC025290069

**Received:** July 15, 2025**1st revised:** September 17, 2025**2nd revised:** October 14, 2025**3rd revised:** November 12, 2025**Accepted:** November 14, 2025**Published online:** December 8, 2025

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**Keywords:** Antisemitic propaganda; Nazi Germany; Visual propaganda; Dehumanization; Economic manipulation; Political subversion

## 1. Introduction

Nazi propaganda was an essential instrument employed by the regime to influence public opinion and solidify its ideological framework. Integral to this endeavor was the pervasive use of visual propaganda, which was instrumental in disseminating the Nazi worldview and advocating its policies. During the Nazi era, visual propaganda was meticulously designed and distributed across various media platforms, including posters, magazine covers, films, and photographs.

Posters, with their striking imagery and bold slogans, conveyed powerful messages to evoke strong emotional responses and support for the regime's ideals, such as racial purity and national pride. Magazine covers from publications like "Der Stürmer" and "Signal" featured dramatic imagery and headlines designed to incite support and shape public perception by showcasing Nazi achievements and demonizing enemies.<sup>1</sup>

Films and newsreels, exemplified by Leni Riefenstahl's "Triumph of the Will," glorified Nazi rallies and leadership, reinforcing loyalty and boosting morale through depictions of German victories. Propaganda photographs and public exhibitions like "The Eternal Jew" combined visual and textual elements to promote Nazi ideologies and educate the public on the regime's political and social goals, ensuring widespread acceptance and support.<sup>2</sup>

The influence of visual propaganda on public opinion was profound. By consistently presenting powerful and emotionally charged imagery, Nazi visual propaganda helped to normalize the regime's ideologies and build public support for its policies. Visuals were designed to evoke strong emotional reactions, creating an atmosphere where the regime's actions seemed justified and necessary.

Visual propaganda activities in Nazi Germany were closely aligned with the regime's general policies. The visuals not only reflected but also actively promoted the key tenets of Nazi ideology: racial purity, the Führer principle, and the *Volksgemeinschaft* (people's community). For example, posters and films often depicted Hitler as a savior and father figure, reinforcing the Führer principle and the idea of unwavering loyalty to the leader. By integrating visual propaganda into everyday life, through public displays, media, and education, the Nazi regime ensured that its messages were ubiquitous and inescapable, fostering a culture of conformity and obedience.<sup>1</sup>

The propaganda techniques of the Nazi regime remain relevant today as they continue to be employed by various political powers to manipulate public opinion and reinforce ideological agendas. Understanding these methods is crucial for recognizing and combating the spread of misinformation and the manipulation of mass perceptions in contemporary political contexts.

Unlike previous studies that concentrated mainly on textual materials, ideological narratives, or a limited range of visuals, this research offers the first systematic analysis of 22 Nazi antisemitic visuals through a structured coding process using ATLAS software, enabling the development of Code Frequency, Quotation, and Co-occurrence Tables that establish a rigorous, replicable analytical framework absent from earlier, predominantly descriptive or interpretive examinations of Nazi propaganda. Furthermore, rather than merely reiterating established facts, this research introduces an innovative interpretative framework by classifying Nazi antisemitic visuals into three core themes and by examining their intersections and co-occurrences, thereby uncovering previously overlooked propaganda patterns and strategies, particularly the recurrent linkage between dehumanization and political subversion as a central narrative device. The

study addresses a well-documented gap in the literature by demonstrating that, despite extensive scholarship on Nazi propaganda, systematic and comprehensive visual analysis has remained largely neglected, and by integrating propaganda theory, visual communication analysis, and antisemitism studies, it offers an interdisciplinary and methodologically distinctive contribution to the field.

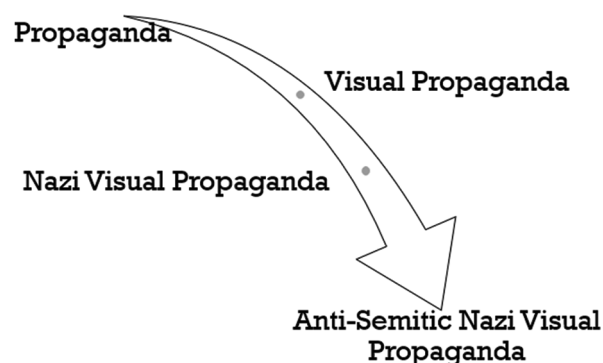
In this regard, this study examines Nazi propaganda, analyzing how visuals were used to manipulate public opinion and promote Nazi antisemitic ideologies, categorized into themes of dehumanization, economic manipulation, and political subversion. The purpose of this study is to analyze a dataset of Nazi antisemitic visuals to uncover the specific themes of Nazi propaganda systematically. In this regard, the following research questions define the directions of the research:

Q<sub>1</sub>: What keywords do Nazi antisemitic visuals combine to convey their messages?

Q<sub>2</sub>: What themes were used together in Nazi antisemitic visuals?

Here, we can observe the antisemitic targets of Nazi visual propaganda unfolding in a series of distinct stages. Representing this as a model, it can be depicted as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 illustrates the hierarchical progression from general propaganda to the specific focus on antisemitic Nazi visual propaganda. The research begins with the broad concept of propaganda; this narrows down to visual propaganda. The next stage focuses on Nazi visual propaganda, highlighting the regime's strategic use of visuals to promote its ideologies. The final stage zeroes in on Nazi antisemitic visual propaganda, depicting the targeted use of visual elements to spread antisemitic beliefs and reinforce negative stereotypes about Jews. This model demonstrates the research's deductive structure, showing how it moves from a broad understanding of propaganda to a specific examination of antisemitic visuals used by the Nazis.



**Figure 1.** Model representation of the deductive study structure. Image created by the author.

## 2. Propaganda

### 2.1. Conceptual review

Nazi propaganda serves as a prime example of how visual propaganda can effectively mobilize and influence the public. Thus, propaganda is essentially a strategic communication tool used to influence public opinion and behavior by spreading specific messages and ideologies. It basically employs various techniques and media power to shape perceptions, attitudes, and actions in a way that serves the interests of those disseminating the propaganda. Understanding the mechanisms and impact of propaganda is crucial for recognizing its power in historical and contemporary contexts. Table 1 lists the definitions of propaganda given by scholars who are considered to be prominent ones in the field of propaganda studies.

Edward Bernays offers the broadest definition by suggesting that the distinction between propaganda and education lies only in the point of view, implying that virtually any advocacy can be seen as propaganda depending on perspective. Chalmers Mitchell provides the narrowest definition, emphasizing self-serving motives and indifference to the truth, focusing on the negative and deceptive aspects of propaganda. These definitions highlight the varying perspectives on what constitutes propaganda, ranging from broad, relative interpretations to specific, negative characterizations. This comparison demonstrates the complexity and contested nature of defining propaganda in scholarly discourse.

### 2.2. Classification of propaganda

As for the classification of propaganda, this is still a controversial topic in political science. For example,

Jacques Ellul's analysis of propaganda includes several nuanced classifications. He distinguishes between agitation propaganda, which is revolutionary and aims to stir people to immediate action, and integration propaganda, which seeks to create conformity and stabilize society by deeply molding individuals for long-term unity. He also differentiates vertical propaganda, a top-down approach from leaders to the masses that is often manipulative, from horizontal propaganda, which originates within the masses and spreads peer-to-peer, often disguised as education. In addition, Ellul contrasts irrational propaganda, which uses emotive appeals, myths, and symbols, with rational propaganda, which appears logical and scientific but can mislead through selective use of facts. His work also differentiates political propaganda, which is deliberate and goal-oriented, often used by governments and parties, from sociological propaganda, which is diffuse and pervasive, subtly influencing societal norms and habits. Moreover, he categorizes propaganda into covert, which is hidden and secretive, leaving the audience unaware of the influence, and overt, which is open and acknowledged with clear sources and intent. Finally, he outlines direct incitement, where the propagandist actively engages with the audience, and indirect incitement, where the audience passively accepts and complies without direct engagement.<sup>7</sup>

Harold Lasswell introduced concepts that categorize propaganda based on the source and truthfulness of the information. White propaganda is open and truthful, coming from a known and credible source. Black propaganda involves false information and deception, with the source being concealed or misrepresented. Gray propaganda falls in between, with information of uncertain or unclear origin, mixing truths and lies to obscure the true

**Table 1. Definitions to the concept of propaganda**

Scholar (year)	Definition
Bernays (1923) <sup>3</sup>	Bernays provides a relativistic definition, stating that propaganda and education differ only by the point of view. This broad definition implies that the label depends on one's perspective, not the nature of the communication.
Lasswell (1927) <sup>4</sup>	Lasswell defines propaganda as the management of opinions and attitudes through the direct manipulation of social suggestion rather than altering environmental conditions. This definition emphasizes manipulation and control, providing a narrower view.
Doob (1966) <sup>5</sup>	Doob defines propaganda as an attempt to affect personalities and control behavior that serves goals judged to be unscientific or doubtful. This definition introduces relativity, making it challenging to apply precisely.
Russell (1967) <sup>6</sup>	Russell's definition starts neutrally but turns negative, characterizing propaganda as any attempt to enlist humans in the service of one party in a dispute. This definition emphasizes the one-sided approach to truth and the generation of party feeling, narrowing its scope to intentional bias and manipulation.
Ellul (1965) <sup>7</sup>	Ellul describes propaganda as a means of gaining power by the psychological manipulation of groups or masses, or using this power with their support. His definition focuses on the element of power and control, implying a broad interpretation.
Smith (1985) <sup>8</sup>	Smith defines propaganda as the systematic effort to manipulate beliefs, attitudes, or actions by using symbols. His definition includes a heavy emphasis on deliberateness and manipulateness, providing a detailed yet broad view.
Carey (1997) <sup>9</sup>	Carey defines propaganda as communications aimed at making a target audience adopt predetermined attitudes and beliefs, contrasting it with education. This definition aligns with the broad notion of pre-selected outcomes.

intent or source. These distinctions help in understanding the various ways propaganda can be used to manipulate public perception and behavior.<sup>4</sup>

Jason Stanley, in *How Propaganda Works*, provides additional insights into propaganda's mechanisms. He identifies supporting propaganda, which claims to embody and genuinely aims to promote certain ideals, in contrast to undermining propaganda, which appears to support these ideals but actually erodes them by creating a contradiction between the proclaimed ideals and the actual goals. Stanley also discusses masking propaganda, which uses ideals to cover up the gap between the proclaimed values and reality, maintaining stability by hiding the system's failures or shortcomings.<sup>10</sup>

Numerous researchers have expanded these classifications over the years. Several authors have divided propaganda into different classifications according to their research method; for example, internal and external propaganda<sup>11</sup>; general, limited, and individual propaganda<sup>12</sup>; political, economic, cultural, and military propaganda<sup>13</sup>; strategic, tactical, and occupation propaganda,<sup>14</sup> etc.

### 2.3. Media and propaganda

The interplay between propaganda and the media is a critical area of study, particularly in understanding how public opinion and behavior are shaped by strategic communication efforts. Propaganda, as defined by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, is a tool used to manipulate public perception by spreading specific messages and ideologies, often through the mass media. Chomsky argues that propaganda functions effectively when supported by the educated classes and when dissent is minimized, illustrating the significant impact of state and media collaboration on public opinion.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, Joan Pedro's analysis extends Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky's propaganda model, highlighting the continued relevance of media control mechanisms in contemporary capitalist democracies.<sup>16</sup> The propaganda model identifies five filters (ownership, advertising, information sourcing, flak, and anti-communism) through which information must pass, shaping news content to serve elite interests. This model underscores the role of media in reinforcing dominant class ideologies and marginalizing alternative viewpoints.<sup>15</sup>

Historically, propaganda has been a potent instrument in shaping political and social landscapes. For instance, during World War I, the Creel Commission, established by President Woodrow Wilson, successfully transformed a pacifist American public into fervent supporters of the war effort through intensive propaganda campaigns. This

effort, supported by media and business interests, set a precedent for future state propaganda operations.

In contemporary times, the incorporation of propaganda into media operations has grown increasingly sophisticated. The public relations industry, which originated from these early propaganda practices, has since evolved to develop methods for effectively managing public perception.<sup>17</sup> Edward Bernays, a pioneer in public relations, described this process as the *engineering of consent*, wherein media and communication strategies are designed to align public opinion with elite interests.<sup>18</sup> The media's role in disseminating propaganda is evident in its ability to manufacture consent and mobilize bias. This is achieved through selective coverage, framing, and the repetition of certain themes that align with the interests of those in power. The media not only informs the public but also shapes the reality that the public perceives, often excluding critical perspectives that challenge the status quo.

Theorizing media content as conspiracy theories offers another lens through which to understand propaganda messages. Conspiracy theories often arise as attempts to explain complex social phenomena in the absence of clear, transparent explanations. Fredric Jameson's notion that conspiracy is a "degraded figure of the total logic of late capital" underscores the cognitive mapping attempts by marginalized groups to make sense of their realities.<sup>19</sup> Scholars such as Bratich<sup>20</sup> and Fenster<sup>21</sup> have explored the rationality and potential liberatory aspects of conspiracy theories, emphasizing the mediated aspects of information over economic determinism. This perspective highlights the gap between perceived and actual realities, a theme common to both ideological analysis and conspiracy theory scholarship.

Contemporary misinformation studies, while indebted to previous frameworks, are heavily influenced by early 21st-century notions of informational ecosystems. These perspectives view media providers and audiences as part of a natural ecosystem, where the quality of information impacts the health of the informational community.<sup>22</sup> Misinformation is often conceptualized as a pollutant or virus, detrimental to the political health of communities.<sup>23</sup> This ecosystemic approach marks a departure from earlier traditions by focusing on the flow and transformation of messages within an information environment, rather than solely on the content or intent of media messages.

Understanding the relationship between propaganda and the media is crucial for recognizing how information is controlled and manipulated in both historical and contemporary contexts. This awareness is essential for fostering a more informed and critical public, capable



of discerning the underlying motivations behind the information they receive. Yet the study of propaganda intersects with broader ideological frameworks, particularly Marxist theories of ideology. Ideology, as defined by Raymond Williams, encompasses a set of ideas and beliefs that are naturalized within society, often carrying deceptive implications.<sup>24</sup> Marxist perspectives emphasize the relationship between economic conditions and ideological constructs, viewing media as a crucial instrument in maintaining and perpetuating dominant ideologies. This focus on structural misrecognition rather than discrete falsehoods marks a significant departure from traditional propaganda analysis, which tends to concentrate on overt, intentional messaging.<sup>25</sup> The collapse of communism and the rise of neoliberal governance have further influenced the academic focus on ideology, intertwining it with the study of media's role in shaping public consciousness.

#### 2.4. Visual propaganda

Visual propaganda has been a powerful tool for influencing public opinion and behavior throughout history. By utilizing imagery, symbols, and visual metaphors, propagandists can convey complex messages succinctly and evoke emotional responses more effectively than through words alone. This paper explores the conceptual framework of visual propaganda, its historical context, mechanisms of influence, and contemporary relevance. Visual propaganda refers to the strategic use of images, symbols, and visual elements to shape public perception and promote specific ideologies or agendas. Unlike textual propaganda, which relies on written or spoken words, visual propaganda leverages the power of visual communication to create immediate and lasting impressions.<sup>26</sup> Key elements of visual propaganda include:

- Imagery and symbols. The use of powerful and easily recognizable images and symbols to convey messages. These can include national flags, iconic leaders, or representations of enemies.<sup>27</sup>
- Emotional appeal. Visual propaganda often evokes strong emotional responses, such as fear, pride, anger, or sympathy, to influence public sentiment.<sup>28</sup>
- Simplification and exaggeration. This is portrayed by simplifying complex issues into clear, easily digestible visual narratives and exaggerating certain elements to enhance impact.<sup>29</sup>
- Repetition. Repeated exposure to visual propaganda reinforces the intended message and ensures it remains in public consciousness.<sup>30</sup>

Visual propaganda operates through several mechanisms that enhance its influence on public perception. The first of them is symbolic representation. Symbols carry deep cultural and emotional meanings. Campaigners use

symbols to tap into existing beliefs and values, making their messages more relatable and persuasive.<sup>31</sup> Besides, visual metaphors in graphic form can simplify complex issues and create strong associations. For example, depicting an enemy as a dangerous animal can evoke fear and justify aggressive actions. The contextual placement of visual propaganda in strategic locations, such as public spaces, media outlets, and educational materials, ensures maximum exposure and reinforces the intended message.<sup>32</sup> Finally, multimedia integration is implemented, if possible. Combining visual propaganda with other media forms, such as radio broadcasts, speeches, and printed materials, creates a cohesive and immersive propaganda experience.<sup>33</sup> Visual propaganda remains a potent tool for influencing public opinion and behavior. Understanding the mechanisms and impact of visual propaganda is crucial for recognizing and countering its influence in both historical and contemporary contexts. As technology continues to evolve, the need for critical engagement with visual media becomes increasingly important to ensure an informed and discerning public.

### 3. Visual propaganda as a key component of Nazi propaganda

Visual propaganda played a pivotal role in the Nazi regime's efforts to consolidate power, manipulate public opinion, and promote its ideological goals. The Nazi regime, under the leadership of Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda, understood the psychological impact of visual stimuli. They harnessed the power of imagery to evoke emotions, create a sense of unity, and convey complex messages quickly and effectively. Visual propaganda was disseminated through posters, films, photographs, and even architecture, making it an omnipresent force in everyday life.

In this context, posters and iconography are fundamental elements. Posters were one of the most ubiquitous forms of Nazi visual propaganda. Bold colors, striking graphics, and simplistic yet powerful slogans characterized these posters, making them easily memorable and highly effective.<sup>34</sup> One of the most iconic images was the Nazi *swastika*, a symbol that came to represent the regime's ideology and was featured prominently in propaganda materials. The posters often depicted idealized Aryan figures, emphasizing themes of strength, purity, and national pride. For instance, posters promoting the Hitler Youth featured healthy, vigorous children engaged in activities like sports and farming, portraying them as the future of the Reich.<sup>1</sup>

The Nazi regime also exploited the medium of film to propagate its messages. Leni Riefenstahl's "Triumph of the Will" (1935) is a quintessential example of Nazi propaganda in cinema. This film documented the 1934 Nuremberg

Rally and was masterfully crafted to glorify Hitler and the Nazi Party. Through impressive cinematography, dramatic music, and carefully orchestrated scenes of mass rallies and parades, the film conveyed an image of a unified, powerful nation led by a charismatic leader. The visual spectacle was designed to evoke feelings of awe and admiration, reinforcing the regime's legitimacy and ideological appeal.

Photography played a crucial role in Nazi propaganda, capturing staged events and manipulated scenes to create a specific narrative. The regime's control over media ensured that only images supporting their agenda were published. Publications like "Der Stürmer" and "Signal" featured photographs that glorified the Nazi leadership, depicted the supposed prosperity of Germany under Nazi rule, and showcased the regime's military prowess. These images were not mere documentation but carefully curated pieces of propaganda meant to shape public perception.

The Nazis also employed architecture as a form of visual propaganda.<sup>34</sup> Albert Speer, Hitler's chief architect, designed grandiose buildings and monumental structures intended to convey the power and permanence of the Third Reich. The Nuremberg Rally Grounds, with their massive scale and neoclassical design, served as a backdrop for Nazi rallies and were integral to the regime's propaganda efforts. These structures were not only functional spaces but also symbolic representations of Nazi ideology, designed to impress and inspire loyalty among the populace.

During World War II, visual propaganda took on even greater significance. The regime used it to boost morale, demonize the enemy, and mobilize the population for the war effort. Posters urging citizens to contribute to the war effort, conserve resources, and remain vigilant against spies were common. The imagery often depicted heroic soldiers, industrious workers, and vigilant citizens, reinforcing the narrative of a united and resilient nation.

### 3.1. Antisemitic visuals in Nazi propaganda

Antisemitic visuals were a central component of Nazi propaganda, employed to disseminate hatred and foster widespread animosity toward Jewish people. The Nazis adeptly used visual media to dehumanize Jews, portray them as enemies of the state, and justify their persecution. The Nazis used various techniques in their propaganda against the Jews. Examples such as Fearmongering, Scapegoating, Demonization, Repetition of false narratives, etc., can be given as examples. We will discuss three techniques according to our research themes.

#### 3.1.1. Dehumanizing/demonizing technique

One of the primary techniques of Nazi antisemitic propaganda was to dehumanize/demonize the Jewish

through grotesque and exaggerated stereotypes. Jews were often depicted with distorted physical features such as hooked noses, bulging eyes, and sinister expressions, reinforcing negative perceptions and instilling fear and revulsion among the German populace. These visual stereotypes were pervasive across various forms of media, including posters, cartoons, and films. For instance, the infamous Nazi propaganda film and poster *Der Ewige Jude* (The Eternal Jew, 1940) presented Jews as subhuman and parasitic. Directed by Fritz Hippler, the film used staged footage and manipulated images to depict Jews as wandering nomads devoid of culture and morality. By portraying Jews as a fundamental threat to Aryan society, the film sought to justify their exclusion and eventual extermination.

#### 3.1.2. Portrayal of Jews as economic parasites

Nazi propaganda also exploited economic anxieties by portraying Jews as parasitic financiers who exploited and manipulated the economy for their gain. This imagery was particularly effective in the context of the economic turmoil of the 1930s. Posters and cartoons frequently depicted Jews as greedy moneylenders, clutching bags of gold or manipulating markets to the detriment of the "honest" German worker.

#### 3.1.3. Political subversion and conspiracy

Another recurring technique in Nazi antisemitic visuals was the portrayal of Jews as masterminds behind political subversion and global conspiracies. This narrative was used to explain various social and political upheavals, attributing them to a sinister Jewish plot. Propaganda materials often depicted Jews as puppeteers controlling world governments, media, and financial institutions. The cover of the Nazi publication *Der Stürmer*, edited by Julius Streicher, frequently featured such imagery. One infamous illustration shows a Jewish figure manipulating world leaders like marionettes, reinforcing the notion of a global Jewish conspiracy. This type of visual propaganda was designed to create a sense of urgency and fear, uniting the populace against a common, fabricated enemy.

### 3.2. Literature review

A substantial body of research exists on Nazi propaganda, with an extensive literature base that is too vast to examine thoroughly. Consequently, this study's literature review is confined to focusing exclusively on antisemitic Nazi propaganda. The relevant literature for our study in this field is summarized in [Table 2](#).

Despite extensive research on Nazi propaganda and its impact on antisemitic beliefs, a significant gap remains in the systematic analysis of Nazi visuals. The current

Table 2. Literature review on Nazi antisemitic propaganda

Author (year)	Research focus	Key finding
Hartmann (1984) <sup>35</sup>	The study investigates the relationship between antisemitism and the appeal of Nazism in Germany, examining whether antisemitism was a significant factor in the Nazi rise to power and its popularity.	The research concludes that while antisemitism was fundamental to Nazi ideology, it was not the primary reason for the Nazi party's rise to power or Hitler's popularity; factors like national greatness and economic despair were more influential. However, antisemitism was a pervasive undercurrent in German culture, facilitating widespread compliance and passive acceptance of Nazi antisemitic policies, with most Germans willing to dehumanize Jews and allowing these policies to take root with little resistance.
Bytwerk (2005) <sup>36</sup>	The study investigates how Nazi propaganda constructed and justified the argument for the genocide of Jews by claiming that Jews were attempting to exterminate Germany and its people.	The research reveals that Nazi propaganda extensively claimed Jews planned to annihilate Germany, using this notion to justify the Holocaust. This argument, promoted through speeches, printed materials, and word-of-mouth, aimed to convince the German populace that exterminating Jews was a necessary act of self-defense against an existential threat.
Herf (2006) <sup>37</sup>	The study investigates how Nazi propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust constructed the Jews as the principal enemy of Germany, thereby justifying their extermination.	The research reveals that Nazi propaganda portrayed Jews as a powerful international conspiracy responsible for instigating World War II and seeking Germany's destruction, justifying genocide as an act of self-defense. This extreme form of antisemitism, combining traditional prejudices with modern conspiracy theories, was crucial in legitimizing the Holocaust among the German populace through speeches, media, and visual propaganda.
Çakı <i>et al.</i> (2019) <sup>38</sup>	The study focuses on the construction of hate speech against Jews through Nazi propaganda posters in occupied Poland during World War II.	The research reveals that Nazi propaganda in Poland systematically used antisemitic posters to portray Jews as a threat to humanity and Christianity, constructing myths that Jews were responsible for suffering and posed a danger to society. These posters employed metaphors and symbols to depict Jews as inherently evil, unhealthy, and deceptive, aiming to garner public support for Nazi policies and discourage Polish assistance to Jews.
Yılmaz <i>et al.</i> (2020) <sup>39</sup>	The study examines the reflection of antisemitic propaganda myths from Nazi ideology in the educational materials during Nazi Germany, specifically focusing on the storybook "The Poisonous Mushroom" ( <i>Der Giftpilz</i> ) by Julius Streicher.	The research reveals that Nazi educational materials, especially the storybook "The Poisonous Mushroom," were instrumental in constructing antisemitic myths, depicting Jews as economic exploiters and threats to society. These myths were systematically embedded in the education system to indoctrinate children with antisemitic views, legitimizing the exclusion and persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany.
Erol (2020) <sup>40</sup>	The study investigates the role of publishing in Nazi Germany, particularly how Nazi ideology was propagated through antisemitic discourses in books.	The research concludes that Nazi Germany's publishing industry was pivotal in spreading antisemitic ideologies, using books like <i>Trau keinem Fuchs auf grüner Heid und keinem Jud auf seinem Eid</i> to construct and disseminate antisemitic myths. These publications significantly reinforced negative perceptions of Jews, portraying them as undesirable, marginalized, and excluded members of society.
Çakı (2019) <sup>41</sup>	The study explores the role of Nazi propaganda in constructing antisemitic myths during Nazi Germany.	The research reveals that Nazi propaganda was crucial in building and reinforcing antisemitic myths in German society, depicting Jews as the cause of World War II, collaborators with enemies, proponents of communism, and a threat to the Aryan race. By analyzing four propaganda visuals ("War Criminal," "Collaborator," "Communism," "Jewish Race"), the study shows how these efforts aimed to instill and strengthen antisemitic sentiments, ultimately facilitating the exclusion and persecution of Jews.
Yurdakul & Alperen (2019) <sup>42</sup>	The study explores the use of children's books as propaganda tools in Nazi Germany, specifically focusing on the book "Der Giftpilz" (The Poisonous Mushroom).	The research reveals that "Der Giftpilz" was a significant tool in Nazi propaganda aimed at indoctrinating children with antisemitic beliefs, using stories, slogans, and illustrations to depict Jews as inherently evil, unhealthy, and deceitful. This propaganda attacked Jews on physical, religious, and moral fronts, instilling fear and hatred in young readers and promoting the idea that Jews were a dangerous influence, thereby ensuring societal acceptance of antisemitic policies and actions.
Steitz (2019) <sup>43</sup>	The study examines the use of Nazi propaganda film techniques in Roland Suso Richter's 1999 courtroom thriller "Nichts als die Wahrheit" (After the Truth), focusing on how these techniques challenge viewers' perceptions and memory of the Holocaust.	The research finds that Richter's film uses similar rhetorical and filmic techniques as Nazi propaganda films to test their manipulative effects on modern audiences, portraying a fictional trial of Josef Mengele to critique viewers' susceptibility to propaganda. The film emphasizes the importance of critically examining representations of the National Socialist past in contemporary media, alerting viewers to the ongoing influence of Nazi propaganda techniques, especially in portraying Holocaust perpetrators in ways that might elicit unintended sympathy or identification.

(Cont'd...)

Table 2. (Continued)

Author (year)	Research focus	Key finding
Voigtländer and Voth (2015) <sup>44</sup>	The study investigates the long-term impact of Nazi indoctrination on antisemitic beliefs in Germany.	The research demonstrates that Nazi indoctrination through schools and youth organizations was highly effective in fostering antisemitic beliefs that persisted long after World War II, with Germans who grew up during the Nazi era holding significantly more antisemitic views than those born before or after. The study highlights a “magnification effect” where indoctrination was especially effective in areas with preexisting antisemitic sentiments, indicating that policy interventions can profoundly shape societal beliefs, particularly when they align with preexisting prejudices.
Bozkanat (2021) <sup>45</sup>	The study focuses on the propaganda techniques used in Nazi Germany, analyzing how these techniques were employed for perception management.	The study reveals that Nazi propaganda, directed by Joseph Goebbels, focused on dehumanizing Jews and portraying them as Germany’s main enemy using techniques like “Name Calling,” “Scapegoating,” and “False Dilemma.” This relentless campaign fostered widespread antiemitism, leading to the acceptance of extreme measures against Jews, including the Holocaust.

literature primarily focuses on the textual and ideological components of Nazi propaganda, often neglecting the extensive visual elements that were crucial in shaping public perception. Studies by Bozkanat,<sup>45</sup> Çakı *et al.*,<sup>38</sup> and Hartmann<sup>35</sup> provide valuable insights into the propaganda techniques and the indoctrination of antisemitic beliefs but rely heavily on the interpretation of a limited number of visuals through manual analysis. This approach, while informative, lacks the breadth and depth necessary to comprehensively understand the full scope of visual propaganda’s impact. The works of Bytwerk<sup>36</sup> and Herf<sup>37</sup> similarly underscore the importance of visual elements in Nazi propaganda but do not systematically analyze these visuals. Voigtländer and Voth<sup>44</sup> demonstrate the long-term effects of indoctrination but focus primarily on educational and textual propaganda, leaving a gap in the understanding of how visual propaganda contributed to these enduring beliefs. This literature gap underscores the need for a more systematic and comprehensive analysis of Nazi visuals to grasp fully their role in the propaganda machine and their influence on public perception and antisemitic attitudes.

This study holds significance as it aims to fill a notable gap in the existing literature by offering a systematic and comprehensive analysis of Nazi visual propaganda, an area that has been largely underexplored in previous research. By meticulously examining the visual elements employed in Nazi propaganda, this study seeks to deepen our understanding of their role in shaping public perception and reinforcing antisemitic attitudes.

### 3.3. Research methods

To conduct a systematic analysis, a dataset comprising 22 visuals was initially compiled on the Figshare platform.<sup>1</sup> These visuals were meticulously selected from Calvin

<sup>1</sup> These images can be accessed through Figshare (<https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.25902097.v1>).

Table 3. Code frequencies table

Theme	Frequency
Dehumanization	9
Economic manipulation	5
Political subversion	8

University’s German Propaganda Archive and the personal collection of Randall Bytwerk, a former scholar at Calvin College. The dataset was categorized into three themes: dehumanization, economic manipulation, and political subversion. ATLAS software was employed to analyze the dataset, as a detailed individual analysis of each visual within the article would be overly extensive. Analytical tables were generated using the ATLAS software, and only those pertinent to our analysis were included in the article; the other tables were excluded from the study. The included tables, such as the Code Frequencies Table, Quotation Table, and Code Co-Occurrence Table, provided a summary of the results.

### 3.4. Findings of the analysis

In the analysis section of this article, we present the findings derived from the systematic examination of the 22 selected visuals. The analysis was conducted using ATLAS software, which enabled the generation of comprehensive analytical tables. Specifically, we include the Code Frequencies Table, which quantifies the occurrence of various codes within the dataset; the Quotation Table, which provides direct excerpts and relevant annotations from the visuals; and the Code Co-occurrence Table, which highlights the relationships and intersections between different codes. These tables collectively offer a structured overview of the dehumanization, economic manipulation, and political subversion themes identified in the Nazi propaganda visuals, providing a detailed summary of our findings (Tables 3-5).



Table 4. Quotation table

Quotation ID	Document ID	Theme	Quotation description
Q1	Dehum - Neandertal Sanat.jpg	Dehumanization	Depicts Jews as primitive and less evolved
Q2	Dehum Polit - Stalin.jpg	Dehumanization	Portrays Jews as demonic figures
Q3	Dehum Polit - Stalin.jpg	Political Subversion	Suggests Jews are behind political conspiracies
Q4	Eco - Der Jude.jpg	Economic Manipulation	Depicts Jews as greedy manipulators of the economy
Q5	Dehum - Alljuda.jpg	Dehumanization	Shows Jews as a menacing crowd
Q6	Dehum - Auslaffen.jpg	Dehumanization	Portrays Jews as venomous snakes
Q7	Dehum - Blut.jpg	Dehumanization	Depicts Jews as inherently corrupt from birth
Q8	Dehum - Der Satan.jpg	Dehumanization	Portrays Jews as satanic figures
Q9	Dehum - Eternal J.png	Dehumanization	Shows Jews as an eternal threat to humanity
Q10	Dehum - Eternal Jude 2.jpg	Dehumanization	Depicts Jews as eternal, unchanging evil
Q11	Dehum - Eternal Jude.jpg	Dehumanization	Portrays Jews as perpetual enemies
Q12	Polit - Parle.jpg	Political Subversion	Depicts Jews as political manipulators manipulating political events
Q13	Eco - Dieh Jude.jpg	Economic Manipulation	Depicts Jews as greedy and manipulative
Q14	Eco - HALT.jpg	Economic Manipulation	Depicts Jews as economic exploiters
Q15	Eco - Jew.jpg	Economic Manipulation	Depicts Jews as economic manipulators
Q16	Eco Polit - Lustige.jpg	Economic Manipulation	Combines economic and political manipulation
Q17	Polit - Festegenagelt.jpg	Political Subversion	Depicts Jews as political subversives
Q18	Polit - Lust.jpg	Political Subversion	Depicts Jews as political conspirators
Q19	Polit - Lustige Bl.jpg	Political Subversion	Depicts Jews as political manipulators controlling politics
Q20	Polit - Lustige Blatter.jpg	Political Subversion	Depicts Jews as global political manipulators
Q21	Polit - Lustige.jpg	Political Subversion	Depicts Jews as political subversives
Q22	Polit dehum - Jew.jpg	Political Subversion	Depicts Jews as monstrous figures undermining political stability
Q23	Polit - the Jew's desire.jpg	Dehumanization	Depicts Jews as grotesque and predatory, consuming others

Table 5. Code co-occurrence table

Theme 1	Theme 2	Co-occurrence frequency
Dehumanization	Economic manipulation	3
Dehumanization	Political subversion	8
Economic manipulation	Political subversion	2

The Theme Frequency Table provides a summary of how often each theme appears across all the analyzed images. This table helps in understanding which themes are most prevalent in Nazi antisemitic visuals. Dehumanization (frequency: 9) is the most frequently occurring theme in the analyzed visuals. It appears nine times out of the total instances recorded. The high frequency of dehumanization indicates that Nazi propaganda heavily relied on portraying Jews as less than human. This tactic aimed to justify discrimination, violence, and eventual extermination by stripping Jews of their humanity and depicting them as monstrous, primitive, or inherently evil.

Economic Manipulation (frequency: 5) appears five times in the analyzed images, making it the least frequent but still significant theme. This theme reflects the Nazi narrative of Jews as greedy and corrupt, manipulating economies for their benefit at the expense of others. This portrayal served to foster resentment and blame towards Jews for economic hardships and inequalities, reinforcing stereotypes and justifying economic disenfranchisement and persecution.

Political Subversion (frequency: 8) is a prominent theme, appearing eight times in the visual propaganda. The frequency of this theme suggests a strong focus on portraying Jews as conspirators aiming to undermine political stability and control governments. This narrative was used to incite fear and paranoia about Jewish influence in political affairs, justifying policies aimed at removing Jews from positions of power and influence.

The Quotation Table provides a detailed description of each image, categorizing them under specific themes and offering insight into how Nazi propaganda utilized visual elements to convey antisemitic messages. By examining

the recurring keywords, we can identify patterns and better understand the methods and focus of the propaganda. In the theme “Dehumanization” (9 instances), there are keywords such as *primitive*, *demonic*, *menacing*, *snakes*, *corrupt*, *satanic*, *eternal threat*, *unchanging evil*, and *perpetual enemies*. The visuals frequently dehumanize Jews by depicting them as less than human, often using terms and imagery that portray them as monstrous or evil. This includes depictions of Jews as primitive and less evolved beings, demonic figures, venomous snakes, inherently corrupt from birth, satanic entities, and eternal threats. The recurring use of these keywords emphasizes the propaganda’s aim to strip Jews of their humanity and present them as a constant danger to society.

In the theme “Economic Manipulation” (5 instances), there are keywords such as *greedy*, *manipulators*, and *economic exploiters*. This theme focuses on depicting Jews as financially exploitative and corrupt. The visuals often portray Jews as greedy manipulators of the economy, reinforcing negative stereotypes about Jewish involvement in financial affairs. The use of these keywords highlights how Nazi propaganda sought to blame Jews for economic problems and justify their exclusion from economic activities.

In the theme “Political Subversion” (8 instances), there are keywords such as *political manipulators*, *conspiracies*, *political subversives*, *controlling politics*, and *global political manipulators*. The theme of political subversion is prominent in the visuals, portraying Jews as conspirators seeking to undermine political stability and control governments. The propaganda uses imagery and language that suggest Jews are behind political events, manipulating politics on both national and global scales. The frequent appearance of these keywords indicates a deliberate effort to instill fear and suspicion about Jewish political influence.

The Code Co-occurrence Table highlights the frequency with which two themes appear together in the analyzed images. Some images contain only one theme, such as dehumanization or economic manipulation alone. However, other images are more complex and include multiple themes at the same time. For example, certain visuals show both economic manipulation and political subversion, or combine dehumanization with political messages. The table quantifies these overlaps, showing how frequently two themes co-occur within the same image. In this regard, the themes “Dehumanization” and “Economic Manipulation” co-occur three times. The relatively low co-occurrence frequency suggests that while Nazi propaganda often combined dehumanizing imagery with accusations of economic manipulation, it was not the most common combination. However, when they do appear together, the visuals likely emphasize Jews

as both subhuman and financially corrupt, intensifying negative stereotypes and justifying economic exclusion and exploitation.

The themes “Dehumanization” and “Political Subversion” co-occur eight times, the highest frequency among the pairs. The high co-occurrence frequency indicates a strong linkage between dehumanizing Jews and depicting them as political conspirators. This combination was a central strategy in Nazi propaganda, portraying Jews not only as subhuman but also as a direct threat to political stability and national security. By intertwining these themes, the propaganda sought to justify extreme measures against Jews, including political disenfranchisement and violence.

The themes “Economic Manipulation” and “Political Subversion” co-occur two times, the lowest frequency among the pairs. The infrequent co-occurrence suggests that while Nazi propaganda did sometimes portray Jews as both economic and political threats, it was less common than other combinations. When these themes do appear together, the imagery likely focuses on Jews as corrupt influencers undermining both the economy and political systems, reinforcing a narrative of pervasive Jewish control and manipulation.

#### 4. Discussion

In the discussion section, we interpret the results of our analysis and explore their broader implications. We examine how the themes of dehumanization, economic manipulation, and political subversion, as evidenced in the propaganda visuals, contributed to the pervasive antisemitic sentiment in Nazi Germany. By contextualizing our findings within the existing body of research, we highlight the effectiveness of visual propaganda in reinforcing prejudiced ideologies and discuss the enduring impact of these propaganda techniques on societal beliefs. This discussion aims to deepen our understanding of the mechanisms through which propaganda shapes public perception and behavior.

The distribution of themes (Table 3) reveals the multifaceted approach of Nazi propaganda in demonizing Jews. By employing dehumanization most frequently, the propaganda aimed to desensitize the public to the atrocities committed against Jews. The themes of economic manipulation and political subversion complemented this by attributing societal problems to Jewish influence, thereby justifying exclusionary and violent policies. This thematic analysis underscores the insidious nature of Nazi propaganda, which systematically utilized these themes to cultivate and reinforce antisemitic attitudes, ultimately paving the way for the Holocaust.

The repetition of specific keywords (Table 4) across different images underscores the consistent and systematic approach of Nazi propaganda in promoting antisemitic themes. The heavy focus on dehumanization suggests a primary goal of desensitizing the public to violence against Jews. Economic manipulation and political subversion themes complement this by providing additional justifications for discriminatory policies. Together, these themes work to create a pervasive and powerful narrative that dehumanizes, vilifies, and marginalizes Jews in various aspects of society.

The co-occurrence frequencies (Table 5) reveal the strategic emphasis of Nazi propaganda. The predominant pairing of dehumanization with political subversion indicates a focused effort to dehumanize Jews while simultaneously portraying them as threats to political stability. This dual narrative was powerful in justifying extreme antisemitic policies and actions. The occasional combination of dehumanization with economic manipulation, and economic manipulation with political subversion, shows that while these themes were used together, they were not the primary focus. The propaganda effectively used these combinations to reinforce different aspects of antisemitic ideology, ensuring a comprehensive and multifaceted attack on the Jewish community.

The impact of antisemitic visuals in Nazi propaganda was profound, as they played a crucial role in normalizing hatred and violence against Jews. By perpetuating dehumanizing stereotypes and promoting false narratives of Jewish malfeasance, these visuals desensitized the German population to the suffering of Jewish people and facilitated their persecution. During the *Kristallnacht pogrom* of November 1938, antisemitic propaganda had already laid the groundwork for widespread public complicity in violence against Jews. The destruction of Jewish property, synagogues, and businesses was met with indifference or approval by many, influenced by years of relentless propaganda. The visual demonization of Jews made such atrocities seem justified and necessary in the eyes of the indoctrinated public.

Analyzing the ability of each of the three themes to mobilize people reveals distinct yet interrelated mechanisms of influence. Dehumanization was particularly effective in desensitizing the German populace to the suffering and atrocities committed against Jews, stripping them of their individuality and humanity, thereby making it psychologically easier for ordinary citizens to condone or even participate in acts of violence and persecution. Economic manipulation leveraged existing economic anxieties by scapegoating Jews as the root cause of financial woes, which not only justified discriminatory economic

policies but also mobilized public anger and frustration towards a common enemy. Political subversion amplified these effects by framing Jews as existential threats to the stability and security of the state, thus invoking a sense of urgency and fear that galvanized support for extreme measures to “protect” the nation. Together, these themes created a powerful and cohesive narrative that mobilized the German population towards collective action against Jews, ultimately facilitating widespread complicity in the Holocaust.

## 5. Conclusion

Antisemitic visuals were a cornerstone of Nazi propaganda, employed to cultivate hatred, justify persecution, and mobilize the population against Jews. Through dehumanizing stereotypes, economic and political scapegoating, and fabricated conspiracy theories, Nazi propaganda created a pervasive climate of antisemitism that facilitated the implementation of the Holocaust. The study of these visuals not only reveals the depth of Nazi cruelty but also serves as a stark reminder of the power of visual media in shaping public perception and inciting violence.

The analysis of Nazi antisemitic propaganda reveals the profound and insidious effects of systematic dehumanization, economic manipulation, and political subversion on public perception and behavior. The consistent use of these themes in visual propaganda played a critical role in fostering widespread antisemitic sentiment in Nazi Germany. By dehumanizing Jews, attributing societal problems to their influence, and portraying them as political subversives, Nazi propaganda created a pervasive narrative that justified exclusionary and violent policies.

The study highlights the powerful impact of propaganda in shaping public opinion and facilitating real-world events, such as the *Kristallnacht pogrom* of November 1938. During this event, the groundwork laid by relentless antisemitic propaganda was evident in the widespread public complicity in violence against Jews. The destruction of Jewish property, synagogues, and businesses was met with indifference or even approval, as the German population had been desensitized to the suffering of Jewish people and conditioned to view such atrocities as justified.

The broader implications of this analysis highlight the lasting influence of propaganda techniques on societal beliefs and behaviors. Comparable patterns are evident in contemporary contexts where propaganda and misinformation continue to mold public opinion and legitimize discriminatory practices. For example, in modern times, the demonization of minority groups

through the media can result in heightened hate crimes and social marginalization. The manipulation of economic narratives to scapegoat particular communities can lead to policies that disproportionately affect those communities, while depicting certain groups as political threats can undermine democratic principles and justify authoritarian measures.

## Acknowledgments

None.

## Funding

None.

## Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Author contributions

This is a single-authored article.

## Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

## Consent for publication

Not applicable.

## Availability of data

A set of 22 Nazi antisemitic images analyzed in this study is accessible through Figshare (<https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.25902097.v1>).

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