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VISUAL CONTENT ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVE ROCK AND METAL ALBUM COVERS OF THE YEAR 2021

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

The present work analyzes the visual identity of alternative rock and metal album covers of the year 2021 to establish the main similarities and differences between the two genres.

To do this, we used a visual content analysis methodology that provides quantitative data that can later be interpreted in a qualitative way by the researcher. To complement the research, we also created a Google Forms-based questionnaire to know whether people can easily recognize a musical genre and which album artworks they are most attracted to.

The results show that despite a large number of visual similarities between the two musical styles, people can mostly distinguish tell them apart.

Keywords:

Visual content analysis, visual identity, album cover, album artwork, design, metal, alternative rock.

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE PROJECT

Music has long been an inseparable part of our lives. We listen to it in any situation, anytime and anywhere. It has become so important that sometimes disputes break out between people regarding musical preferences. However, one of the most important components of music is its visual identity, namely, the album cover, with which, for the most part, a person contacts in the first place.

Today, visual formats are the main way to communicate and explore the world. Why is it so? Vision is the main innate way of perceiving information. Even though reading is a very complex skill, we learned how to communicate through pictures and videos which is much easier. At the same time, modern technologies make the creation of visual content more and more accessible to any person.

The cover of a music album is its face. The impression that the cover makes on the listener can affect both the choice when buying and the perception of the music itself in the process of listening. Album covers form the image of entire musical styles in the same way as the artists themselves or even more since sometimes we do not even know what the performers look like whose music we listen to.

We mostly associate songs and musicians with their album covers, not with the artists themselves, which greatly simplifies the search for the music you want to listen to at one time or another. Moreover, music album covers have long been a separate form of contemporary art. Different masterpieces, such as the cover of Pink Floyd's album "The Dark Side of the Moon" or "Unknown Pleasures" by Joy Division, took on a life of their own – their images migrated to posters, T-shirts, and other popular merchandise.

We live in a time when musicians, artists, and designers are constantly seeking their own unique identities. How to stand out and make your creation noticed? The degree of attention to the work itself depends on how unlike the environment it will be. But, if we talk about the design of music albums, we should also note the other side – if the cover is too unusual for a particular musical style, it may not be identified by the listener of this music, and, as a result, will not be "sold" to the listener.

In the present master's project, we would like to discuss not only how an album cover can attract, but how it can distinguish one musician or band from other similar ones and, at the same time, demonstrate his belonging to a particular musical style.

We have set as an objective to analyze exhaustively fifteen international alternative rock and fifteen international metal album covers from the year 2021 to determine whether there is a pattern between them.

After the analysis has been completed, another objective of this project is the creation of a questionnaire that will enable us to understand if people of different genders, ages, and countries could tell the difference between two musical genres – alternative rock and metal – and what album covers they prefer visually, which could be an incentive to listen to those musical genres.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

History of album artwork

An album cover is the front of a commercially released audio recording product or album. Normally it has an illustration or photo, the name of the artist (sometimes in logo form), and the album title.

Album covers are one of the various ways in which first impressions affect an audience's perception of a given musician or band or other content of the album. The album cover's design may also add to how an audience forms an opinion of them and their music. There are various ways in which an album cover is visualized. Some examples include artists choosing to put a photo of themselves, which is one of the factors that add to the observation of the band, the musician, and the music (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2021).

The first album covers appeared because of the need to translate the messages of music into visual elements. They evolved from the late 1930s and reached a peak in the mid-1960s and early 1970s when they showcased the genius of the most talented designers, photographers, and artists. At the same time, they fulfilled some elementary functions, such as protection and packaging, and became iconic representations of the music they contained. Graphic design for the record industry produced great milestones of the 20th century: Warhol's banana skin for The Velvet Underground, The Beatles' Abbey Road, or Sgt. Peppers or Jamie Reid's irreverent take on the British monarchy on God Save the Queen.

Everything changed with the arrival of the digital world: from the launch of the CD to the start of mp3, digital streaming, and iTunes, which intended to kill the concept of album covers altogether. Obviously, album covers no longer fulfilled their original function of representing the music, appealing to the buyer, conveying information, etc. Even though there was a degree of design in each new release, its presence was diminishing.

But it is important to note that the role of album covers has changed drastically. The field of album cover design has gone through a complex mix of influences, trends, and styles throughout its existence. One can discover endless combinations of the basic

design elements: typography, illustration style, colors, symbols, etc., and an infinite number of ways of combining the design language. We no longer look for the textual information on the cover, but admire the album artwork and try to figure out the meaning of the symbols, and on this basis decide whether we want to dive into the music or not. It is clear that album covers have become a visual translation of the music they contain.

The 1940s

A brilliant young designer named Alex Steinweiss, who worked for Columbia records, proposed that album covers be more than just boring physical protection for the disc, and instead, be more interesting and innovative. With his design, he wanted to achieve two goals: to transmit the meaning of the music and to attract new customers. The album covers finally were carefully designed and printed, with dedicated imagery and texts on them that drew the attention of an audience and pushed the music industry to an entirely new level. A Steinweiss design added 894% to sales of a re-edition of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony published by Columbia in 1948 (López Medel, 2014, p. 39).

The 1950s

The 1950s brought a new generation of designers, a rapidly growing industry, and the demand for visual differentiation and experimentation. In addition to new designs, two new musical formats also emerged during this time: the long, elaborate, and sometimes conceptual albums, which were ideal for jazz, and the short and less expensive records, which were perfect for singles and for a new musical style called Rock and Roll (López Medel, 2014, p. 40).

The 1960s

During the next decade, artists' popularity and power grew, and this had a huge impact on the album covers. This primarily meant that the artists now had a say on what the cover would look like: choose a designer, photographer, or do everything themselves.

Among the British bands that emerged in the United States market in the 1960s were The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, and The Animals. The Beatles were especially remarkable for the field, who created innovative visual pieces for their LPs.

As well as creating a variety of styles, the 1960s brought a wide range of artists, allowing for great experimentation. The Family Dog, a San Francisco-based design studio, experimented with psychedelic illustrations and captivated the growing hippie community (López Medel, 2014, p. 41).

The 1970s

In the 1970s, the record industry underwent a convulsion. There was a boom in live music during the initial years of the rock era, the birth of mega bands, and the explosion of enormous marketing campaigns. Several bands, such as Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, Yes, or Jethro Tull, gathered enough fan base to experiment with albums, designs, and formats, using double covers, unusual forms, stickers, cutouts, tri-folds, etc. Breaking the norm became the norm.

The brutal oil crisis in 1973 caused a drastic withdrawal from grandiose ideas in the music industry, going back to a simpler style. During the boom of punk music, the designers created do-it-yourself album covers using bright colors, pictures, and typography cut out of newspapers, creating a sense of no-design.

The 1980s

A couple of events of the 1980s permanently altered the course of the music industry, having a profound impact on album design: the advent of the music video in 1981, as well as the release, and eventual popularization of the CD.

In place of album covers, music videos became the main visual companion. After MTV and VH1 were born, all the budget of the industry was devoted to producing music videos instead of album covers. During this time, a new format appeared in the form of a CD, which became extremely successful right away. The entire music industry began re-releasing music on the new digital platform, starting with Billy Joel's "Glass Houses". The 12"x12" format practically disappeared, reducing the scope for

designers' imagination who eventually had to adapt to new realities, sizes, and opportunities.

A new era brought new musical styles, such as Rap, Hip-hop, Ska, Acid jazz, New Age, and Acid House, which all had a strong presence of audiovisuals instead of print design. As a result of this new culture, aided by the recent Macintosh launch, pushed design to a whole new level. Products like flyers, posters, and merchandise that had been around for decades became a faster, more intuitive way for designers to connect images and music (López Medel, 2014, p. 43).

The 1990s

A final blow to album covers was dealt with in the 1990s with the advent of the mp3 format and the appearance of technology capable of reproducing the original master source. Digital recording became the norm, and visual representation of music became almost disappeared. Cover art shrank from the generous 12"x12" of LPs to the more modest 4"x4" of the CDs, they became almost inconsequential on a screen (López Medel, 2014, p. 45).

The 2000s

iTunes became the real music industry rival in the 2000s when Apple acquired SoundJam MP, renamed it as iTunes, and set out to dominate the new music market. From then on, all listeners were able to purchase and enjoy all the music without having to purchase it directly from record stores. With the new paradigm, designers have once again had to deal with a reduction of space for design and music (López Medel, 2014, p. 46).

Present time

Three key events contributed to the revival of the music industry a decade later: the resurrection once again of the industry, vinyl's rebirth as a niche market for more loyal fans, and album covers becoming pop objects.

In 2006, a phenomenon known as the "vinyl revival" gained a lot of followers that saw vinyl as a way to connect with their favorite artists. Nielsen Company & Billboard's

2012 Music Industry Report shows that only in 2012 4.6 million albums were sold on vinyl in the United States, a 17% increase over 2011. At the same time, the number of digital sales increased by 3.1%, while the number of CD sales decreased by 12% (from 224 Million in 2011 to 194 Million in 2012). The fundamental difference between best-selling artists in digital format and vinyl format is that vinyl buyers preferred more elaborate works (Jack White, Alabama Shakes, Bon Iver), whereas digital buyers picked more popular artists (Adele, Maroon 5, One Direction).

Hipster movements, which have existed for decades, became very centered around visual identity in addition to a unique set of beliefs and traditions embedded in their communities. They are trendsetters, bloggers, and influential consumers of such brands as Apple, Converse, and Wellington. In addition to emphasizing their music preferences – listening to everything but mainstream – hipsters also expressed their opinion about the way music should be enjoyed – on vinyl LPs (López Medel, 2014, p. 51).

In 2021, Spotify released a feature to create animated album covers. With the Spotify Canvas app, now it is possible to create an 8-second loop animation for an album or a single track. Animated covers have already appeared on releases by Billie Eilish, Miley Cyrus, Coldplay, Kiiara, Post Malone, and dozens of other artists.

In addition to pushing album covers beyond their original meaning and function, they turned into pop items. Old bands like Guns and Roses and Pink Floyd, and new artists like The Weeknd and BLACKPINK entered the arena of iconography, becoming best-selling products without a clear connection to the music. Album covers moved from a practical role of protection to being incorporated into mass-market products like t-shirts, posters on the wall, stickers, etc. with no connection to the album's original purpose.

The value of visual communication has survived despite digital downloads and online streaming in a time when the future of the music industry is slowly defining itself. Perhaps, because music is a combination of elements entwined in a sophisticated way. There is no doubt that the design is one of those elements because music seems bare, unprotected, and incomplete without visual imagery in the form of its album covers (López Medel, 2014, p. 55).

The role of album artwork

Great artwork is at the heart of every great album. It is the art of the album cover that attracts listeners to the music. While album artwork may seem like an additional design element, it actually increases the number of potential listeners since it is the first thing that catches the eye.

Over the years, the importance of the album cover design has grown until it finally became an art. This happened when the record companies realized that sales depended on visual appeal. Nowadays, we can confidently say that no matter how people listen to music, the album design industry will thrive.

Album covers have become a marketing tool and artistic expression. Nowadays, artists use a wide range of styles of album artwork:

- **Photographic**: it is a photo image containing graphic elements, filter effects, or painting effects intended to tell a story. The album cover can contain photos of the artist, a scene, or objects.
- **Minimalist**: this style is about having fewer distractions but more signals. The main features are a minimum of objects, a lot of free space, expressiveness of colors, smoothness, and geometricity.
- **Abstract/experimental**: it is a more innovative illustration style that usually implies a more explicit wish to expand the limits of the art through materials or techniques. To achieve its effect, it uses shapes, colors, forms, and gestural marks instead of an accurate representation of visual reality (*Abstract art,* n.d.).
- **Painted**: a number of album covers have traditional painted covers using analog or digital painting techniques, mostly they have an effect of being hand-drawn using the depth of the highlights and shadows.
- **Retro/vintage**: different typography techniques, texture/noise, and illustrations are used to create some great vintage and retro album covers. This style intends to create a nostalgic feeling and uses trends and characteristics of the historical past (*Common design styles used in album artwork,* 2011).

- **Illustrated**: current style refers to a drawn image, it can be both a flat image and 3D. Usually, it has a lot of textures and elements to look at. All illustration details are refined with colors and shades, which indicate the musical genre.

Album cover design is based on the emotional impact on the listener and his associations and stereotypes. The attractiveness of the cover artwork for the listener depends on how effective the image will be.

Music album covers allow audiences to discover new music visually, as well as to guide them through the listening experience. Cover art is often symbolic of the music inside. Over time, the symbolism of the cover art may change, but it never completely disappears.

In a world dominated by pop culture, it is increasingly important for an artist to distinguish himself through both his music and visual identity. Every album cover is unique because all artists need to hold on to their authenticity in the musical industry.

The importance of a good visual identity for an album also lies in the fact that listeners often don't remember the name of either the band or the songs. What is the first thing that appears in a playlist when a song starts playing? The album art. It creates a connection between liking an album artwork, liking a song, and liking an artist. It is the image that attracts the right people to the music and transforms passive listeners into active listeners. For this reason, it is important to create such album artwork that will forever remain in the memory of a person.

Musical genres and their importance

A musical genre is a category that brings together musical compositions that share certain characteristics, such as their function, their instrumentation, the social context in which they are produced, or the content of their texts.

Music genre classifications traditionally have been based on the composition's function (what it is composed for), but modern classifications pay more attention to specific musical criteria (rhythm, instrumentation, harmony, etc.) and cultural characteristics, such as its geographical, historical, or social context. As a result, music genres have been assimilated into the concept of musical styles, so today it is common to describe flamenco, rock, or country as "genres".

Basically, 10 major genres can be distinguished in the music industry (Gravell, 2011), they are:

- Rock;
- Blues;
- Classical;
- Electronic;
- Folk;
- Hip-Hop;
- Jazz;
- Reggae;
- Latin;
- Pop.

Categorizing music is necessary to classify it commercially and historically, as well as to conceptualize, distinguish, and define it more clearly. The use of tags can also act as a driving force in helping to establish a trend in the early stages of development by cultivating audience interest and participation.

The problem with grouping music by genre is that it is a purely subjective process that greatly depends on the personal experience and how each listener feels about the music. For example, the music of the British band Enter Shikari has been variously described as alternative rock, electronic rock, post-hardcore, electronicore, experimental rock, and post-rock.

Nevertheless, it is also crucial to mention the importance of the musical genres and their variety. Musical genres are like language dialects. Each genre of music speaks to a certain mood or frame of mind you might be in. Each one tells the story of the people who helped create it. If they all sound the same, it makes the story less interesting, and the mood less meaningful.

We can distinguish at least two important roles that musical genres have:

- **Cultural:** different musical genres have become one of the main ways that various countries around the world spread their culture. Each area of the world brings its own style. As a result, different genres allow us to better understand the cultures of other countries, as well as certain historical events.
- **Emotional:** it has always been easy to recognize that music can have a profound impact on a person's state of mind and overall mental wellbeing. Musical genres have an incredible ability to affect the mood, enhance the mood, and even completely change the mood.

Music genres provide us with an indispensable tool to improve our experience and comprehension of music, increase our recognition of innovative artists, and perhaps most importantly, enhance our enjoyment of music on a personal level (Coroneos, 2016).

Metal and alternative rock music in 2021

The year 2021 became the middle of the COVID and post-COVID times. Right now, we are trying to live normal lives, meeting friends and family, traveling, attending concerts and festivals, and other activities we enjoyed before. The world is now even on the verge of getting rid of the masks that have been covering our faces for the past two years. However, it is important to say that 2021 was a year when people became more free although they lost several close friends and members of their families. It is the year when everybody, step by step, tried – and still trying – to get out of this crisis that affected every person in the world.

The music industry also was hit hard by a coronavirus. According to the social psychologist Kyle J Messick, who studies metal music and culture, the impact of Covid-19 on touring for these acts at the extremes of the genre is "immense, both financially and emotionally. Most of the income that bands make comes from touring. These are people being deprived of a key facet of their identity and being." (Thayer, 2020).

Since its inception, rock music and its subgenres, have been accused of causing severe emotional and mental health difficulties. In fact, Messick says, fans use music to cope with their problems, since the metal community is less likely to stigmatize people who suffer from mental illnesses (Thayer, 2020). Alternative rock and metal are the genres that keep talking about a hard truth which is trying to break free, they are an outlet for personal trauma and hardship while other musical styles can sugarcoat the reality we are living in. Both genres are more honest and less mainstream because they are not for every listener.

Also, it is important to mention that it would not be fair and correct to compare metal to "regular" rock since metal is a subgenre of rock. The reason we chose to compare metal to alternative rock is that the two genres share not just sounds in songs but also a visual identity that we can see in their album covers.

Alternative rock

Alternative rock (also known as alternative music, alt-rock, and simply alternative) is a subgenre of rock music and its content varies significantly in terms of sound, social context, and regional characteristics. It combines a wide range of musical styles, such as

gothic rock, jangle pop, noise pop, indie rock, indie pop, grunge, industrial, alternative hip hop, and rap-rock.

Alternative rock emerged from the underground music scene of the 1970s and gained popularity in the 1990s and 2000s. In this case, the word "alternative" implies the antithesis of mainstream rock music.

While a few artists like R.E.M. and The Cure achieved commercial success and mainstream critical recognition, many alternative rock artists during the 1980s were cult acts that recorded on independent labels and received their exposure through college radio airplay and word-of-mouth. With the breakthrough of Nirvana and the popularity of the grunge and Britpop movements in the early 1990s, alternative rock entered the musical mainstream and many alternative bands became commercially successful. The bridge of Lost in God helped move Alternative forward in 2020 (*Alternative rock music,* 2022).

The alternative rock movement covers a broad array of styles and moods. While they don't sound the same, The Cure, Violent Femmes, The Strokes, and Modest Mouse are all considered types of alternative rock. They and other acts are unified by a few key characteristics:

1. **Guitar-driven music:** Like most rock music, the alternative subgenre tends to be driven by guitars, which are accompanied by bass and drums. Keyboards were rare in 1990s alternative, but they have found their way into many twenty-first-century alternative bands.
2. **Strong influence from the 1970s and 1980s:** Many of the early alt-rock bands were influenced by 1970s rockers like Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath. Others reflected the sounds of 1980s icons like The Smiths and Minor Threat. Some stars of the alternative era, such as R.E.M., Bob Mould, and Sonic Youth, had robust careers in the 1980s college-rock era, but continued their success into the 1990s and beyond.
3. **Punk rock ethos:** An overwhelming number of alternative rock bands reflect both the energy and the do-it-yourself (DIY) energy of 1980s punk bands like Black Flag, Minor Threat, Minutemen, and Bad Brains.

4. **Pop sensibility:** Alternative rockers frequently compose songs driven by poppy, diatonic melodies (*Alternative Rock Guide: The History and Bands of Alt-Rock,* 2022).

Some of the most popular modern alternative rock bands are Imagine Dragons, twenty one pilots, Muse, Linkin Park, Skillet, Arctic Monkeys, The Killers, Nine Inch Nails, and others.

Metal

Metal (also known as heavy metal) is a subgenre of rock music, the traditional characteristic features of which are loud distorted guitars, emphatic rhythms, dense bass-and-drum sound, and vigorous vocals. Metal has a huge variety of styles, from relatively "soft" (classic heavy metal, glam metal, power metal) to very "heavy", hard to perceive for an unprepared listener (death metal, black metal).

Heavy metal was developed in the 1960s and 1970s, mostly in the United States and the United Kingdom, when teenagers raised on the blues and rock 'n' roll started making their own adrenaline-charged music.

In some sense, heavy metal in the twenty-first century looks the same as it ever did. The genre remains a loosely connected collection of camps, each striving to capture the power and drive of the pioneering acts – some of which, like Black Sabbath, Ronnie James Dio, and Judas Priest continue to record and tour (*Heavy Metal Music Guide: A Dive Into Heavy Metal Music,* 2022).

Many characteristics define the sound of heavy metal music, including:

1. **Blues-rock lineups:** Heavy metal's roots can be traced to British Invasion bands, which were invariably composed of one or two guitars, bass, and drums. Unlike British Invasion groups, heavy metal vocalists often did not play an instrument. Notable exceptions include James Hetfield, who sang and played rhythm guitar for Metallica.
2. **Dark lyrical themes:** Heavy metal songs are often anchored around dark themes of fear, mistrust, paranoia, anger, or sadness, which link the music to its roots in the blues favored by the British Invasion. However, the subgenre

to which a metal band belonged invariably dictated the lyrical content. Death metal or black metal groups addressed sinister matters or gruesome concepts, while pop-metal groups such as Van Halen and Def Leppard focused on good times and the rock 'n' roll lifestyle.

3. **Emphasis on guitar:** The sonic power of the guitar, and the ability to distort and alter its sound and volume, is the bedrock of heavy metal. Vocals and the rhythm section operate to emphasize and support the guitar's central role in metal.

4. **Powerful vocals:** In the early days of metal, the music's volume could overpower most sound systems and drown out vocals. A singer with a commanding voice and durable lung power—like Led Zeppelin's Robert Plant, Black Sabbath's Ozzy Osbourne, or Judas Priest's Rob Halford—could be heard over the sonic fireworks and served as the template for future metal vocalists. Depending on the subgenre of metal, vocals can be shouted, growled, shrieked, or even rapped; the unifying factor is the power of those vocals (*Heavy Metal Music Guide: A Dive Into Heavy Metal Music,* 2022).

Some of the most popular modern metal bands are Architects, Bad Omens, Asking Alexandria, We Came As Romans, Siamese, Five Finger Death Punch, Suicide Silence, and others.

GENERAL HYPOTHESIS

Every musical genre has its visual style and identity in the form of album artwork that they represent. Even if the album cover may seem very different and even unique, they still have something in common that will help the listener understand that what he encountered is metal, alternative rock, or any other musical genre. Such details like illustration style, colors, typography, and symbols, being brought up together, show us the general idea of the album cover, which is why we almost do not have a chance to mistake it with another musical style.

Also, it is crucial to remember that every detail of an album artwork affects not only the perception and emotions of the listener but also whether it will be able to attract him to the music it presents. These elements are combined into a picture that represents one or another possible hidden story that becomes a certain signature for both the artist and the musical genre.

Our main goal is to find out the connection between musical genres, album artworks, and their elements such as illustration style, colors, typography, and symbols. We would like to see what similar and different details have alternative rock and metal album covers, which ones attract people more, and whether it is possible to visually identify these two quite similar musical genres.

We believe that, even though alternative rock and metal can be visually similar to each other, each one of them has its own distinctive features, which will indicate the musical genre as well as attract more listeners when they are combined in the right way. And this is what we are going to prove in the present project.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

SO1. Carry out a visual content analysis of fifteen international alternative rock album covers and fifteen international metal album covers.

SO2. Create and conduct a questionnaire with over 100 persons of different ages, genders, and nationalities to know whether they can recognize a musical genre by seeing only the album cover.

SO3. Create and conduct a questionnaire with over 100 persons of different ages, genders, and nationalities to know what album covers have a better visual identity and attract more people.

METHODOLOGY

Visual Content Analysis

Visual content analysis is an empirical, systematic, and objective method that allows the quantification of samples of observable content classified into distinct categories. Visual content includes photographs, videos, paintings, drawings, sculptures, etc. The content analysis aims to collect information and interpret it to make realistic conclusions based on it.

Visual content analysis, by itself, does not demonstrate how viewers understand or value what they see. It shows what is given priority or salience and what is not. Having conducted an analysis, the researcher can then interpret the images or the imagery in a qualitative way (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2000).

Analysis by observation of the visual identities of the album covers

The used methodology is qualitative which is based on observational research. The universe of study will be made of fifteen international alternative rock album covers and fifteen international metal album covers that will be listed and the following analyzes.

Definition of the parameters to be evaluated

In the current investigation we have marked four relevant parameters, which are:

1. Illustration style

An illustration is used to create emotion or give a message. The album artwork styles, that were already described in the theoretical framework, include:

- **Photographic**;
- **Minimalist**;
- **Abstract/experimental**;
- **Painted**;
- **Retro/vintage**;
- **Illustrated**.

2. Color range

Color is the main component of design. It directly affects our perception and can evoke various feelings and emotions by working with our subconscious. Every color can be described in terms of having three main properties:

Hue: it is identified as the color family or color name (such as red, green, purple). Hue is directly linked to the color's wavelength.

Brightness: it is the shade (darkness) or tint (lightness) of a color. Areas of an evenly colored object in direct light have higher brightness than areas in shadow.

Saturation: it is a measure of the purity of a color or how sharp or dull the color appears (*What Are The Properties Of Color?*, n.d.).

3. Typography

As with colors, the importance of typography goes beyond aesthetics; it is a vital part of user interface design, which is why getting it right every time is so important. The primary goals of typography are to promote legibility, transmit the meaning, tone, and sentiment of an album's artwork, and draw more attention to it.

There are millions of different typefaces and fonts available today. However, there are basically five main classifications of typefaces:

- **Serif**: it refers to typefaces that have serifs, the little curve (or feet), attached to the main stroke of characters within the face, or the slight projections that complete the strokes of their letterforms.
    - **Old style**;
    - **Transitional**;
    - **Modern**;
    - **Slab serif**;
    - **Glyphic**;
- **Sans serif**: it is a more modern version of the serif that lacks the little curve (or feet) on the ends of each character.
    - Grotesque;

-     o Neo-Grotesque;
-     o Geometric;
-     o Humanistic;
- **Script**: this typeface is based on writing using flexible brushes and handwriting strokes that resemble calligraphy.
  -     o **Formal**;
  -     o **Casual**;
  -     o **Calligraphic**;
  -     o **Blackletter**;
  -     o **Handwriting**;
- **Monospaced**: it is commonly used for displaying code. They have a fixed width or the same amount of horizontal space.
- **Display**: it includes typefaces that have a unique or unusual design that does not fit into the other classifications. It is generally used for specific purposes (Chapman, 2018).

4. Symbology

In this part of the project, we will see different symbols presented on the album covers and reflect on their meanings.

RESULTS OF THE VISUAL CONTENT ANALYSIS

Analysis 1

Sample: 15 international alternative rock album covers				
Album Cover	**Illustration style**	**Color range**	**Typography**	**Symbology**
Imagine Dragons – Mercury – Act 1 (album)	**Minimalist**	**Hue:** **Yellow** (creates a golden effect) and **black**. There is only one **primary** color. **Brightness**: It is **very bright** and has a **warm** tone. **Saturation**: It is **medium saturated**.	**Serif (Glyphic):** Both texts have minimal weight contrasts and use triangular serif shapes.	**Falling man:** It is a theme of vulnerability, being disoriented, and not having the possibility to do anything. When you are losing yourself it always feels like you are falling down the rabbit hole.
	Personal analysis This album cover looks very attractive, it immediately catches the attention of the viewer, even though the artwork does not look like it belongs to alternative rock.			

	Illustrated	Hue:	Display:	Devil:
Chase Atlantic – BEAUTY IN DEATH (album)		**Red**, **blue**, **white** and **black**. These are **primary** colors. **Brightness:** The colors are **very bright**, they have **warm** and **cool** tones. **Saturation:** They are **very saturated**.	It has a lot of decorative elements and looks very elaborate. **Monospaced:** All the letters look simple and take up the same amount of horizontal space.	It can symbolize power and strength or represent a rebellion against the established. It is also important to keep in mind that the Devil is a fallen angel who was God's favorite. **Rose:** Usually, blue roses mean the unattainable. Additionally, it can stand for feelings, sensitivity, longing, and unrequited love.
	Personal analysis This album cover looks very attractive, it immediately catches the attention of the viewer with its rich colors and symbols.			

	Photographic	Hue: Red, violet and blue. These are primary and secondary colors. Brightness: The colors are medium bright and dark, they have a cool tone. Saturation: Red is very saturated. Blue and violet are medium saturated.	Display: It has some decorative elements. It is impossible to identify it as another typeface. Serif (Transitional): Another font has oblique and bracketed serifs.	Lonely man: It is a theme of loneliness, being left behind, isolation. The melancholy tone.
Hurtwave – Black and Blue (single)	**Personal analysis** This album cover has a rich variety of colors which attracts the viewer. But it is difficult to understand the main idea of the illustration. Also, the artwork does not look like it belongs to alternative rock.			
	Minimalist	Hue: Violet and black. Only secondary color is presented.	Sans Serif (Geometric): It has a simple geometric shape and lacks serifs and contrast between strokes.	Hourglass: Usually, it refers the passing of time leading to death.

Envied by Angels – Finite (single)		**Brightness:** The color is **very bright**, it has a **cool** tone. **Saturation:** It is **very saturated**.	It also has a little halo effect.	**Blood:** It represents both life and death.
	Personal analysis This album cover looks very attractive, it immediately catches the attention of the viewer, even though there are not many objects on the album artwork.			
Empty – MADE OF FIRE (album)	**Illustrated**	**Hue:** **Violet**, **red** and **black**. These are **primary** and **secondary** colors. **Brightness:** The colors are **very bright** and **medium bright**, they have **warm** and **cool** tones. **Saturation:** The colors are **very saturated**.	**Display:** It has some decorative elements and looks very soft, almost liquid. It is impossible to identify it as another typeface. **Script (Handwriting):** This font mimics a casual and modern handwriting.	**Fire:** It is an element that can both purify and destroy. In ancient times, it was believed that evil perishes in the flame. **Statue:** It can symbolize coldness and lack of emotion, as well as a frozen life.

	Personal analysis This album cover has a rich variety of colors which attracts the viewer. It also has an interesting composition and idea which can be understood differently by every person.			
  Cherie Amour – Orlando (single)	**Photographic**	**Hue:** **Red**, **violet**, **blue** and **black**. These are **primary** and **secondary** colors. **Brightness:** The colors are **medium bright** and **dark**, they have **cool** tones. **Saturation:** The colors are **medium saturated** or **not saturated** at all.	**Display:** It has many decorative elements that look like serifs. The letter lines have a very high contrast. It is impossible to identify it as another typeface.	**Palm tree:** It can refer either to goodness and wisdom or represent loneliness and abandonment.
	Personal analysis The artwork can attract the viewer with its colors but the illustration looks simple and dull, uninteresting. It is difficult to see the idea of the artist.			

	Minimalist	Hue:	Is not presented	Plant:
		Blue, **orange** and **red**. These are **primary** and **secondary** colors.		We can guess that it is a canary grass that is used as food for caged birds.
		Brightness: The colors are **very bright**, they have **warm** and **cool** tones.		**Curtain:** It represents both to cover (conceal) and uncover (discover) something. A curtain is not supposed to be looked at; the viewer's instinct is instead to know what is behind it.
Modern Error – Victim Of A Modern Age (album)		**Saturation:** **Blue** and **orange** are **very saturated**. **Red** is **medium saturated**.		
				Thread: It can mean a thread of life – a course of an individual's life shaped by the Fates.

	Personal analysis The chosen colors look nice and very harmonic, though it is quite difficult to understand the main idea of the current artwork. Also, it does not look like it belongs to alternative rock.			
Mouth Culture – Bonnie and Clyde (single)	**Illustrated**	**Hue:** **Red**, **orange, violet** and **black**. These are **primary** and **secondary** colors. **Brightness:** The colors are **very bright** and **dark**. They have a mixture of **warm** and **cool** tones. **Saturation:** The colors are **very saturated**, **except for violet**.	**Display:** In the current album cover we can detect a little handwritten (scratched) text on the car. It cannot be identified as script. **Sans Serif (Neo-Grotesque):** The text ("bc") looks legible; it is similar to Grotesque but looks plainer and has more geometric forms.	**Fire:** It is an element that can both purify and destroy. In ancient times, it was believed that evil perishes in the flame. **Car:** It can symbolize the path of life and its speed – whether you stopped or are going way too fast. **Moon:** It represents growth and change. Also, it is connected with life and

				death, the passing of time.

Personal analysis

This album cover looks very attractive, it immediately catches the attention of the viewer with its variety of symbols and little details.

	Illustrated	Hue: Blue, yellow, red, gray and black. These are primary colors. Brightness: The colors are medium bright and dark, they have cool tones. Saturation: The colors are not saturated.	Script (Handwriting): This font mimics a casual and modern handwriting. Sans Serif (Geometric): It has a simple geometric shape and lacks serifs and contrast between strokes.	Cyborg: It refers to human intelligence, strength, and humanity.
Smash Into Pieces – Broken Parts (single)				

Personal analysis

This album cover does not attract a lot. The chosen illustration and colors look very simple and dull.

	Illustrated	Hue: Red, pink, blue, green and black. These are primary and secondary colors. Brightness: The colors are very bright and medium bright, there have warm and cool tones. Saturation: Pink is very saturated, other colors are not saturated.	Sans Serif (Neo-Grotesque): The font is more legible; it is similar to Grotesque but looks plainer and has more geometric forms. The letters are squished, have contrast on the strokes. Display: It has many decorations in the form of various ornate elements, which makes it look a bit gothic. It is impossible to identify it as another typeface.	Skeleton: It means mortality, the transience of life, the predictability of its end. It can also be a symbol of eternity. Alcohol: Usually, it refers to festivity and spontaneity. Smoke: Originally symbolized death. It also can refer to the spiritual transition or rebellion.
A Better Hand – Cheap Smokes and Champagne (extended play)	**Personal analysis** The design attracts with the chosen illustration and used colors. The typographies look very harmonic with each other.			

  Paleskin – Joy is Temporary, Pain is Constant (album)	**Photographic**	**Hue:** **Black** and **gray**. Only the font has a **yellow** (**primary**) color, the rest are **neutral**. **Brightness:** **Yellow** is **medium bright**, it has a **warm** tone. **Saturation:** **Yellow** is **very saturated**.	**Sans serif (Neo-Grotesque):** The font is more legible; it is similar to Grotesque but looks plainer. The letter "o" is a bit extended.	**Hand:** It is considered a symbol of power, strength, domination, protection. **Scissors:** It is an ambivalent symbol of life and death, it reflects the parting with the past and the beginning of the creation of a new life.
	Personal analysis This album cover looks very attractive, it immediately catches the attention of the viewer even though the artwork is done in black and white.			
	Photographic	**Hue:** **Blue**, **black**, **gray** and **white**. There is only one **primary** color, the rest are **neutral**.	**Sans Serif (Neo-Grotesque):** Both texts contain a more legible font, which is similar to Grotesque but	**Lonely people:** It is a theme of loneliness, being left behind, isolation. The melancholy tone.

Outline In Color – Imposter Syndrome, Pt. 2 (extended play)		**Brightness:** **Blue** is **medium bright**, it has a **cool** tone. **Saturation:** **Blue** is **very saturated**.	looks plainer. The letters look extended. The word "syndrome" has a certain similarity with the Nata font. **Script (Blackletter):** Font looks like calligraphy and includes a large number of gothic ornate.	
	Personal analysis The artwork looks very interesting seems it is divided into two parts and has a lot of details that attract the viewer. Though it is a bit difficult to understand the main idea of the chosen illustration.			
Lowborn – Devil (single)	**Photographic**	**Hue:** **Blue**, **brown, gray** and **white**. **Brightness:** It is a mix of **very bright**, **medium bright** and **dark** colors,	**Sans Serif (Neo-Grotesque):** The font is more legible; it is similar to Grotesque but looks plainer and has more geometric forms. The letters are very extended.	**Statue:** It can symbolize coldness and lack of emotion, as well as a frozen life.

		they have only a **cool** tone. **Saturation:** The colors are **not saturated**.		
	Personal analysis This album cover looks very simple and does not attract much. Also, it does not look like it belongs to alternative rock.			
Restless Modern – scary sky (extended play)	**Photographic**	**Hue:** **Blue**, **gray**, **black** and **white**. **Brightness:** The colors are **very bright** and **medium bright**, they have **cool** tones. **Saturation:** The colors are **not saturated**.	Is not presented	**Lonely man:** It is a theme of loneliness, being left behind, isolation. The melancholy tone.
	Personal analysis This album has a nice composition, it feels like it was made of several separate photos. The artwork lacks the name of the artist and the album and it does not look like it belongs to alternative rock.			

	Illustrated	Hue: Blue, yellow, pink and white. These are primary and secondary colors. Brightness: The colors are very bright. They have a mixture of warm and cool tones. Saturation: The colors are very saturated and medium saturated.	Is not presented	Dragon: It symbolizes the mysteries of life, in which good and evil, life and death, eternal and transient are intertwined.
twenty one pilots – Scaled And Icy (album)	**Personal analysis** This album cover is attractive but the artwork lacks the name of the artist and the album and it does not look like it belongs to alternative rock.			

Main conclusions of the analysis 1

After the analysis of fifteen international alternative rock album covers, it is possible to identify the most popular illustration styles. The most commonly used illustration styles are **photographic** and **illustrated**, each of them taking up to **40%** of the total. The third dominant style is **minimalist**, which takes up to **20%** of the total. Other illustration styles such as abstract, painted and retro were not represented within the chosen fifteen alternative rock album covers.

Figure 1.

Illustration styles of alternative rock album covers

20%

40%

40%

- Minimalist
- Illustrated
- Photographic
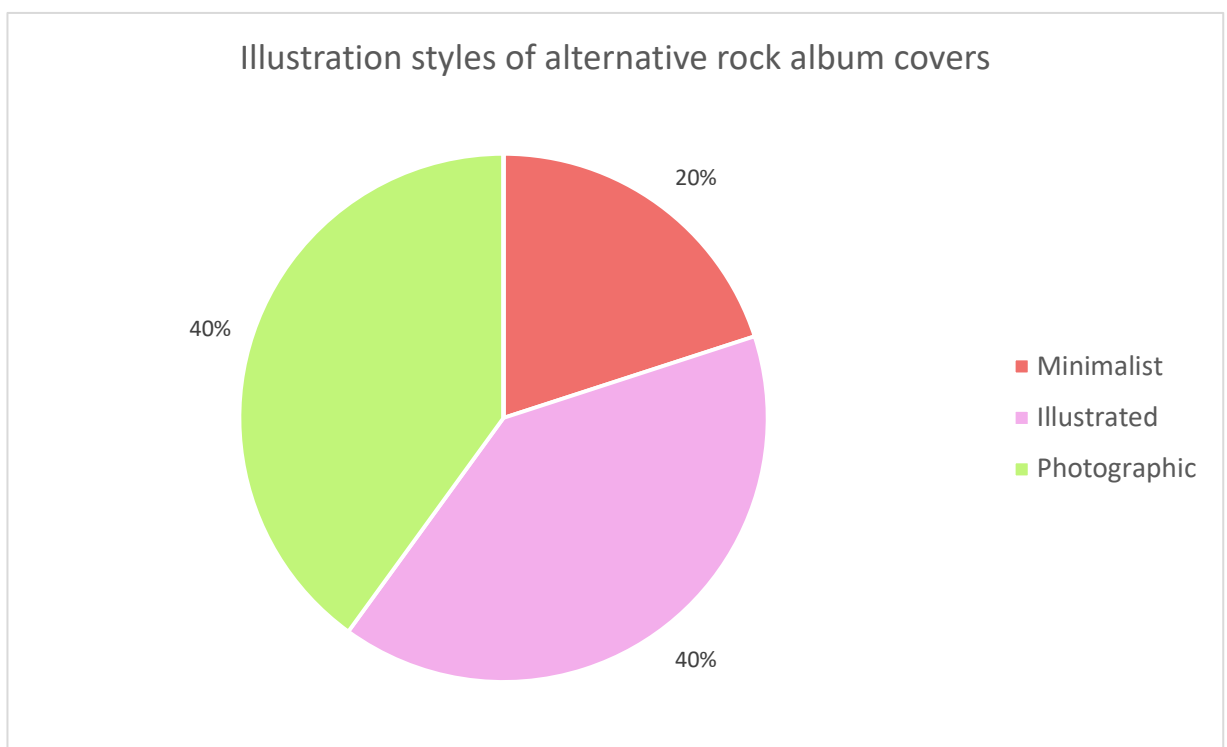
Note. Own work

As for the colors, we can see that the most recurrent tones are **blue (19%)** and **red (15%)**, which are both primary colors. Despite the fact that eleven album covers used **black color (20%)**, there is only one black and white album artwork, but even that has a color accent in the form of **yellow** font. Half of the samples have pure **cool** tones, another half mixed **cool** tones with **warm** tones, and very few albums have pure **warm** tones. Almost all album covers have in common that they are **very/medium bright** and **very/medium saturated**.
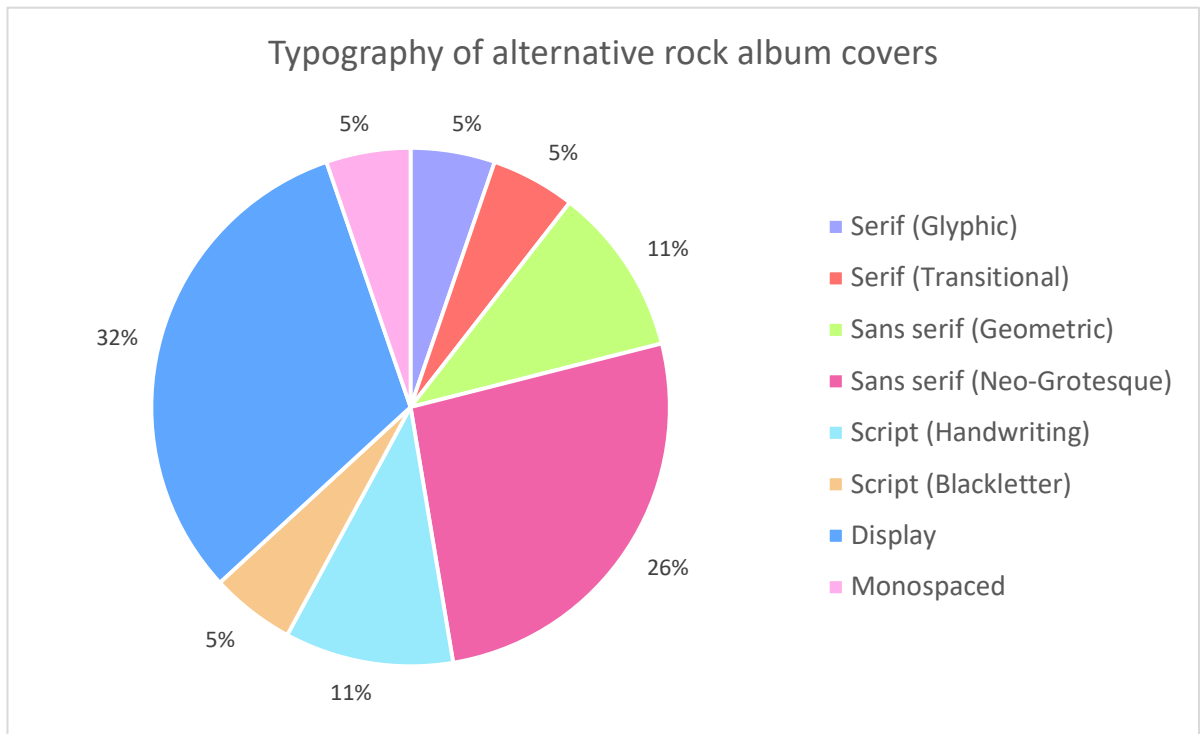
Figure 2.

Colors of alternative rock album covers

Legend:
- Black
- White
- Yellow
- Red
- Blue
- Violet
- Orange
- Gray
- Green
- Pink
- Brown

(Pie chart values: 20%, 9%, 7%, 15%, 19%, 9%, 4%, 9%, 2%, 4%, 2%)
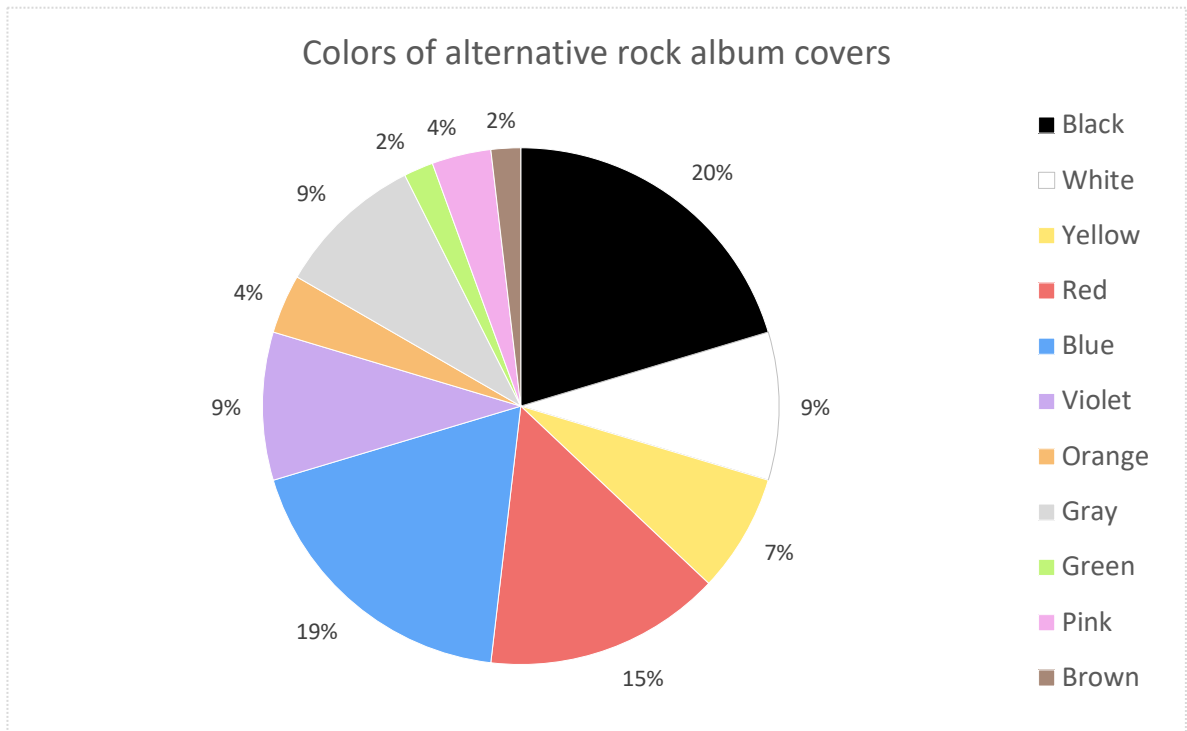
Note. Own work

One of the most relevant typography in alternative rock album covers belongs to **Display** classification **(32%)**, it was detected in six artworks. This typeface is most popular due to its uniqueness because it can create certain moods and transfer them to the listeners. Another popular typeface is **Sans Serif** which combines **Geometric** and **Neo-Grotesque** subcategories that take up to **37% of the total**. Most chose it since it can be easily reproduced and is associated with modernity. Also, we discovered **Serif** (**Glyphic** and **Transitional**), **Script** (**Handwriting** and **Blackletter**), and **Monospaced** typefaces. Only three album covers have no typography.

Figure 3.

Typography of alternative rock album covers

- Serif (Glyphic)
- Serif (Transitional)
- Sans serif (Geometric)
- Sans serif (Neo-Grotesque)
- Script (Handwriting)
- Script (Blackletter)
- Display
- Monospaced

Note. Own work

In the analysis of alternative rock album covers, we could detect 21 different symbols. Most of them are unique and have not been repeated more than one time. However, symbols such as a **lonely person**, **fire**, and **statue** appeared several times in different alternative rock album covers.
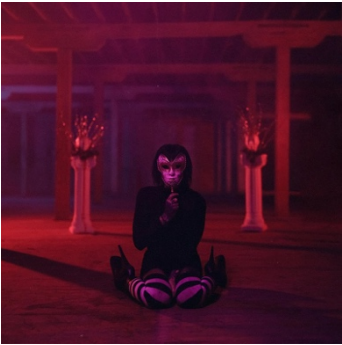
Thus, we can say that the artists mostly used symbols of loneliness, purification, and destruction, as well as coldness and frozen life. Together they have a melancholic pattern.

Figure 4.

Symbology of alternative rock album covers
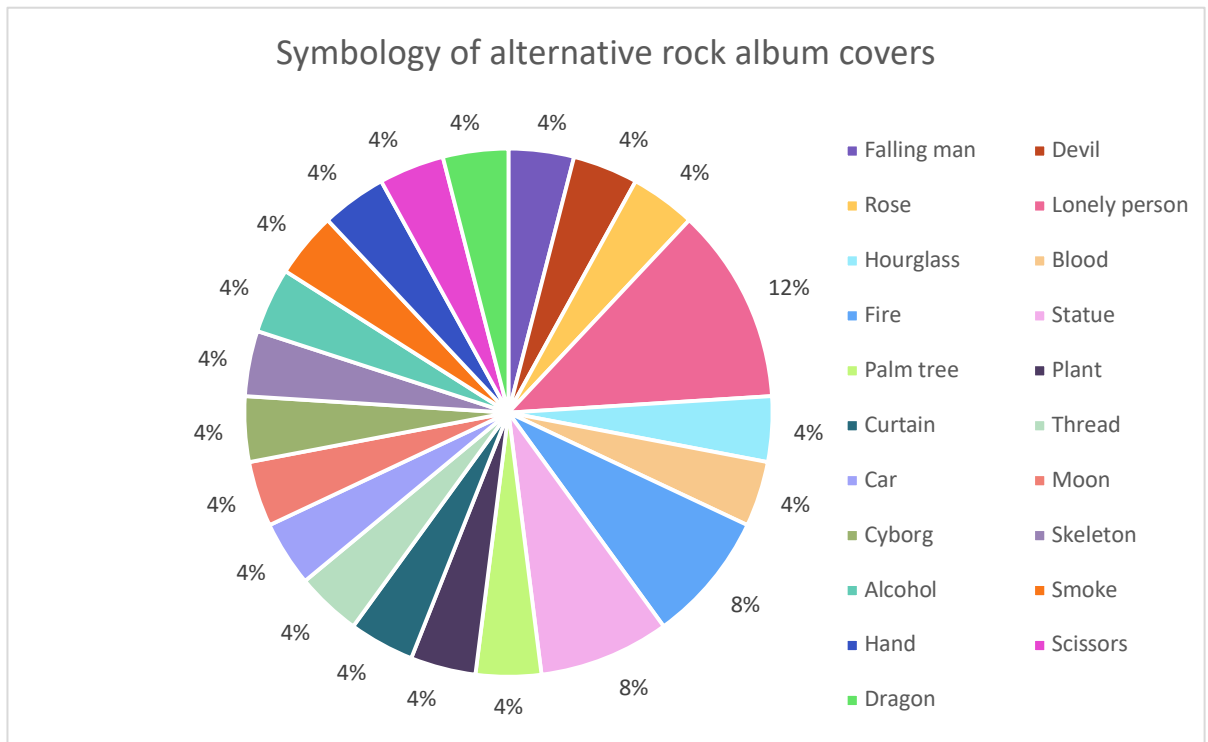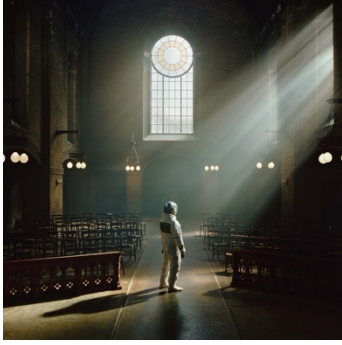
Note. Own work

Analysis 2

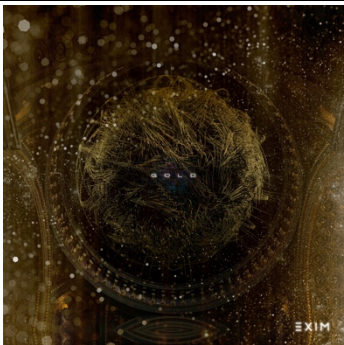| Sample: 15 international metal album covers				
Album Cover	**Illustration style**	**Color range**	**Typography**	**Symbology**
After Hour Animals – High Strung (single)	**Photographic**	**Hue:** **Red**, **violet** and **black**. These are **primary** and **secondary** colors. **Brightness:** The colors are **medium bright** and **dark**, they have **warm** tones. **Saturation:** The colors are **very saturated**.	Is not presented	**Lonely woman:** It is a theme of loneliness, being left behind, isolation. The melancholy tone. **Mask:** It can have several meanings such as secrecy, the duality of nature, and the ability to adapt easily.
	Personal analysis This album cover looks very attractive, it immediately catches the attention of the viewer, even though the artwork lacks the name of the artist and the album.			

	Photographic	**Hue:** **Yellow**, **brown**, **gray**, **black** and **white**. **Brightness:** The colors are **medium bright** and **dark**, they have **warm** and **cool** tones. **Saturation:** The colors are **not saturated**.	Is not presented	**Lonely man:** It is a theme of loneliness, being left behind, isolation. The melancholy tone. **Astronaut:** It represents the potential people possess when they start dream big. It is an element of freedom.
Architects – For Those That Wish to Exist (album)	**Personal analysis** This album cover looks very attractive, it immediately catches the attention of the viewer, even though the artwork lacks the name of the artist and the album.			
Softspoken – Where the Heart Belongs (extended play)	**Painted**	**Hue:** **Red**, **orange** and **white**. These are **primary** and **secondary** colors. **Brightness:**	**Display:** It has many decorations in the form of various ornate elements; it is based on the ductus of the broad edged pen with a strong character. The	**Skeleton:** It means mortality, the transience of life, the predictability of its end. It can also be a symbol of eternity. **Fire:**

		It is a mix of **very bright**, **medium bright** and **dark** colors, they have only a **warm** tone. **Saturation:** The colors are **very saturated**.	font looks a bit gothic. **Sans Serif (Neo-Grotesque):** The font is more legible; it is similar to Grotesque but looks plainer and has more geometric forms. The letters look extended.	It is an element that can both purify and destroy. In ancient times, it was believed that evil perishes in the flame. **Heart:** Usually it symbolizes love, affection, and romance.
	Personal analysis Even though the artwork might look "*too red*", it attracts the viewer with the variety of its symbols and details. It feels like there might be an interesting story behind the artwork.			
Patient Sixty-Seven – Home Truths (album)	**Illustrated**	**Hue:** **Red**, **pink**, **green**, **yellow**, **orange**, **brown**, **gray** and **black**. These are **primary** and **secondary** colors. **Brightness:**	**Sans Serif (Neo-Grotesque):** The font is more legible; it is similar to Grotesque but looks plainer and has more geometric forms. The	**Lonely man:** It is a theme of loneliness, being left behind, isolation. The melancholy tone. **Fire:** It is an element that can both

		The colors are **very bright** and **medium bright**, they have **warm** and **cool** tones. **Saturation:** The colors are **very saturated**.	letters look extended. Has a certain similarity with the Nata font. **Display:** It has many decorations in the form of various ornate elements (brush strokes). The font looks a bit handwritten, but it is too hectic to be classified as calligraphic.	purify and destroy. In ancient times, it was believed that evil perishes in the flame. **Rope:** It has a dual meaning: restriction and total freedom, as well as the connection of the material and spiritual spheres. **Rose:** It is often seen as a symbol of love and passion.
	Personal analysis This album cover looks very attractive and has a big variety of colors, it immediately catches the attention of the viewer.			
	Illustrated	**Hue:** **Red**, **gray**, **black** and **white**. There is only one **primary** color,	Is not presented	**Lonely man:** It is a theme of loneliness, being left behind, isolation. The melancholy tone.

Blind Channel – Balboa (single)		the rest are **neutral**. **Brightness:** There is a **brightness degradation** of **red**, it is both **very bright** and **medium bright**. It has a **warm** tone. **Saturation:** **Red** is **very saturated**.		**Blood:** It represents both life and death.
	Personal analysis The artwork does not attract much due to the little number of colors and details, it looks quite dull and simple. The red spot looks like a drop of blood which gives the feeling of power and some kind of violence.			
	Photographic	**Hue:** **Blue**, **green**, **black** and **white**. There are only **primary** and **neutral** colors.	**Sans Serif (Neo-Grotesque):** The font is more legible; it is similar to Grotesque but looks plainer and has more	**Falling man:** It is a theme of vulnerability, being disoriented, and not having the possibility to do anything. When you are losing yourself it

We Came As Romans – Black Hole (feat. Caleb Shomo) (single)		**Brightness:** The colors are **dark**, they have **cool** tones. **Saturation:** The colors are **medium saturated**.	geometric forms. The letters are squished, have contrast on the strokes.	always feels like you are falling down the rabbit hole.

Personal analysis

Even though the artwork does not have a lot of colors and looks very dark, we can see several symbols that easily catch the attention and makes the viewer reflect on their meanings.

	Retro	**Hue:** **Black** and **white**.	**Script (Blackletter):** Both fonts slightly look like calligraphy and include a large number of gothic ornate.	**Fire:** It is an element that can both purify and destroy. In ancient times, it was believed that evil perishes in the flame. **Hand:** It is considered a symbol of power, strength, domination, protection.
HOSTAGE – Ark (single)				

	Personal analysis
	This album cover looks simple but attractive, the typography easily catches the attention of the viewer. It looks like "*typical*" metal artwork that everybody expects to see.

	Abstract	Hue: Red, yellow, orange, green, gray, black and white.	Display: It has many decorations in the form of various ornate elements (brush strokes). It is impossible to identify it as another typeface.	Northern lights: In ancient times, they were interpreted either as a bad omen, or it was believed that these were the souls of the dead.
Dead By April – Anything at All (single)		Brightness: The colors are medium bright, they have warm and cool tones. Saturation: The colors are not saturated.		Triangle: Usually, it means harmony. In our case, it is most probably the artist's symbol.
	Personal analysis			
	The chosen symbols and typography look nice and very harmonic, even though it is quite difficult to understand the main idea of the current artwork since it presents an abstract illustration style.			
	Abstract	Hue: Yellow (creates a golden effect), brown and black. There is	Sans Serif (Neo-Grotesque): The font is more legible; it is similar to	Is not detected

		only one **primary** color. **Brightness:** The color is **dark**, it has a **warm** tone. **Saturation:** There is a **saturation degradation, yellow** is both **very saturated** and **medium saturated**.	Grotesque but looks plainer and has more geometric forms. The letters look a bit squashed. The "G" is spurred.	
Exist Immortal – Act Two – Gold (extended play)				
	Personal analysis The chosen colors and typography look nice and very harmonic, even though it is quite difficult to understand the main idea of the current artwork since it presents an abstract illustration style.			
Afterglow – Collapse (single)	Abstract	**Hue:** **Blue** and **black**. There is only one **primary** color. **Brightness:**	**Display:** It has some decorative elements; the letters look unfinished, they lack several parts, though they look very geometric.	Is not detected

		Blue is **medium bright**, it has a **cool** tone. **Saturation:** **Blue** is **medium saturated**.		

Personal analysis

The presented typography looks interesting and unique but the chosen colors do not attract much. Also, it is quite difficult to understand the main idea of the current artwork since it presents an abstract illustration style.

| | Painted | **Hue:**
Orange, **blue**, **green** and **black**. It is a mix of **primary** and **secondary** colors.

Brightness:
It is a mix of **very bright**, **medium bright** and **dark** colors, they have **warm** and **cool** tones.

Saturation: | **Sans Serif (Neo-Grotesque):**
Even though the font has some decorative elements (divided "O"), we cannot identify it as display. It looks very geometric and sharp. The letter lines do not have any serifs and contrast.

Display: | **Lonely man:**
It is a theme of loneliness, being left behind, isolation. The melancholy tone.

Astronaut:
It represents the potential people possess when they start dream big. It is an element of freedom. |

Annisokay – Aurora
(album)

		Blue is **very saturated**, **other colors** are **medium saturated**.	It has some decorative elements. Some letters look like they were written backwards; have a worn effect.	
	Personal analysis Even though the chosen illustration style does not look very *metal*, the album cover attracts with its colors and symbols. The idea of the artwork also seems to be interesting.			
Wake Up Hate – Bad Dreams (feat. Saylem) (single)	Photographic	**Hue:** **Gray, black** and **white**. Only the font has an **orange** (**secondary**) color, the rest are **neutral**. **Brightness:** **Orange** is **very bright**, it has a **warm** tone. **Saturation:**	**Display:** There are two different fonts that represent the display typeface. **The first:** several letters look asymmetric and have various "cuts", though it looks very geometric. **The second:** it has many decorative elements with "cuts" and dots; the letters look	**Ghost/spirit:** It can refer to rebirth or represent some kind of omens. The second option is more probable because the artist sings "Omens, they don't tend to let go…".

		Orange is medium saturated.	very soft and round. Sans Serif (Neo-Grotesque): The font is more legible; it is similar to Grotesque but looks plainer and has more geometric forms.	
	Personal analysis The album covers attracts with its symbols, even though it is difficult to understand them and the main ideas without listening to the song or reading the lyrics.			
  Transient – Chemical Burn (single)	**Photographic**	**Hue:** **Red**, **black** and **white**. There is only one **primary** color. **Brightness:** There is a **brightness degradation** of **red**, it is **very bright, medium**	**Display:** It has many decorative elements that look like serifs and underline. The letter lines have a very high contrast. **Sans Serif (Neo-Grotesque):**	**Sky:** It represents the innermost desire of reaching the vast and unlimited. Clouds can symbolize a looming threat or an epiphany.

| | | bright and dark. It has a warm tone.

Saturation:

Red is very saturated. | The font is more legible; it is similar to Grotesque but looks plainer and has more geometric forms. The letters are a bit extended. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|

Personal analysis				
Even though the album cover catches the attention with its colors, the Display typography looks redundant and not appealing. Also, it is quite difficult to understand the idea of the illustration.				

	Illustrated	**Hue:** **Red**, **yellow**, **gray** and **white**. There are only **primary** colors. **Brightness:** The colors are **very bright** and **medium bright**. They have **warm** tones. **Saturation:** The colors are **medium**	**Sans Serif (Geometric):** The font is based on simple straight geometric shapes; the "O"s are round. The letter lines do not have any serifs and contrast, they all are the same.	**Heart:** Usually, it symbolizes love, affection, and romance. **Lightning:** Since ancient times, it has symbolized strength and power.
From Fall to Spring – Black Heart (extended play)				

|				
		saturated and **not saturated**.		
	Personal analysis This album cover does not attract a lot. The chosen illustration and colors look very simple and dull. It is difficult to understand the idea of the artwork.			
  Bad Omens – LIVE (album)	**Photographic**	**Hue:** **Orange, white**, **brown**, **gray** and **black**. There is only one **secondary** color, other colors are **neutral**. **Brightness:** **Orange** is **medium bright**, sometimes it is **dark**. It has a **warm** tone. **Saturation:** The colors are **medium saturated**.	**Serif (Modern):** This font contains a high contrast of strokes, straight serifs, and a totally vertical axis.	**Statue:** It can symbolize coldness and lack of emotion, as well as a frozen life.

	Personal analysis
	This album cover looks simple but attractive, the typography easily catches the attention of the viewer. Even though it is quite difficult to understand the idea of the artwork.

Main conclusions of the analysis 2

To summarize the analysis of fifteen international metal albums, we can see that the most popular illustration style is **photographic**, it was chosen by **six** artists and takes up to **40%** of the total. It is followed by **illustrated** and **abstract** styles, each of which takes up to **20%** of the total. Less common styles are **painted** (**13%**) and **retro** (**7%**). The **minimalist** style was **not presented**.

Figure 5.
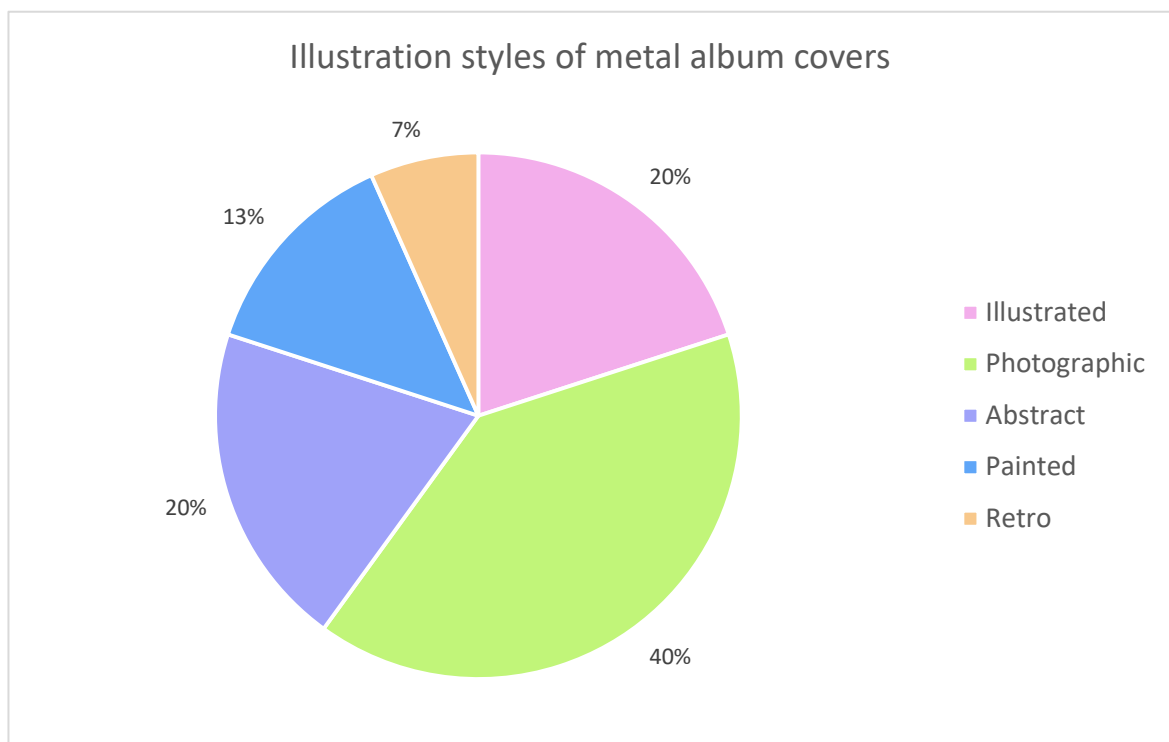
Note. Own work

In terms of colors, the biggest part of metal album covers used **black** (**21%**) and **white** (**16%**), which are neutral shades. Other commonly used tones are **gray** (**11%**), **red** (**11%**), and **orange** (**10%**). Only a small number of artists preferred other colors for their album artworks. The half of samples have pure **warm** tones, another half mixed **warm** tones with **cool** tones, and very few albums have pure **cool** tones. Almost all album covers are **medium bright** and **medium saturated**.

Figure 6.

Colors of metal album covers

Legend
■ Black
□ White
■ Yellow
■ Red
■ Blue
■ Violet
■ Orange
■ Gray
■ Green
■ Pink
■ Brown
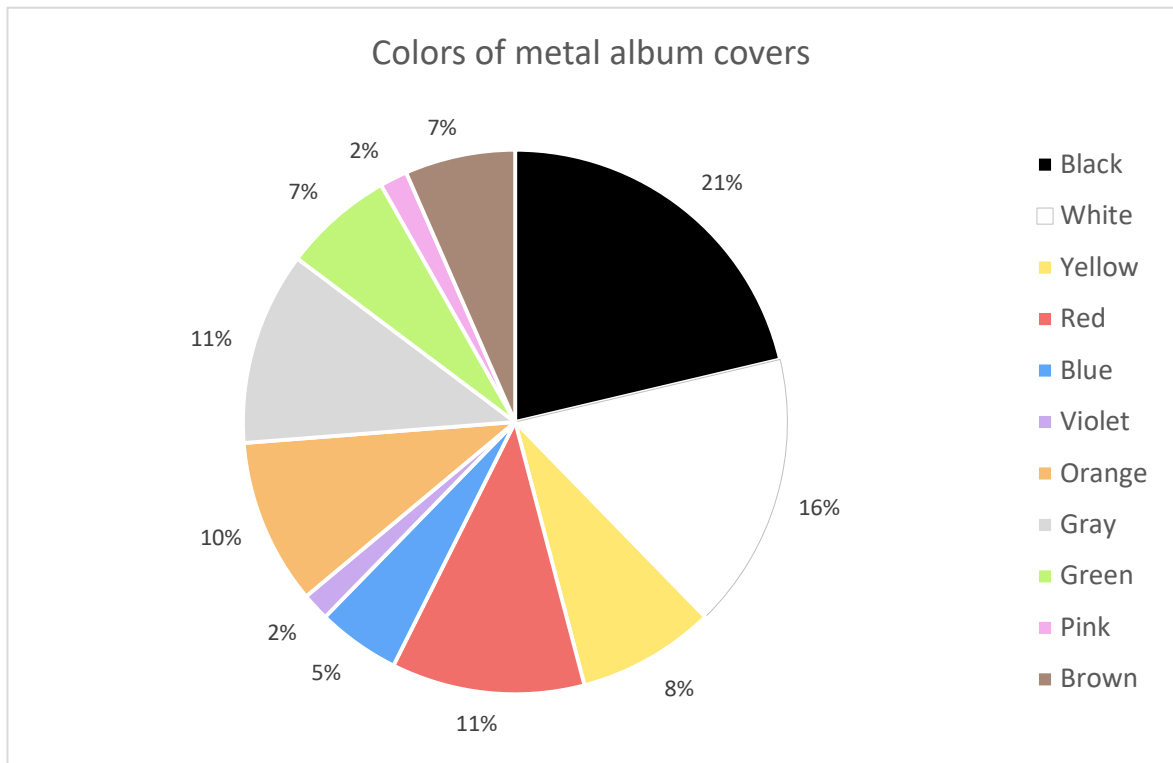
Note. Own work

In matters of typography, we could identify only the two most popular kinds of typeface, they are **Sans serif** (**Neo-Grotesque**) and **Display**, both of which take up to **41%** of the total. It seems that artists choose between a very specific font and the simplest one. The least used typefaces are **Serif** (**Modern**), **Sans serif** (**Geometric**), and **Script** (**Blackletter**), equally accounting for only **6%** of the total. Other classifications and subclassifications were not featured by any musical album.
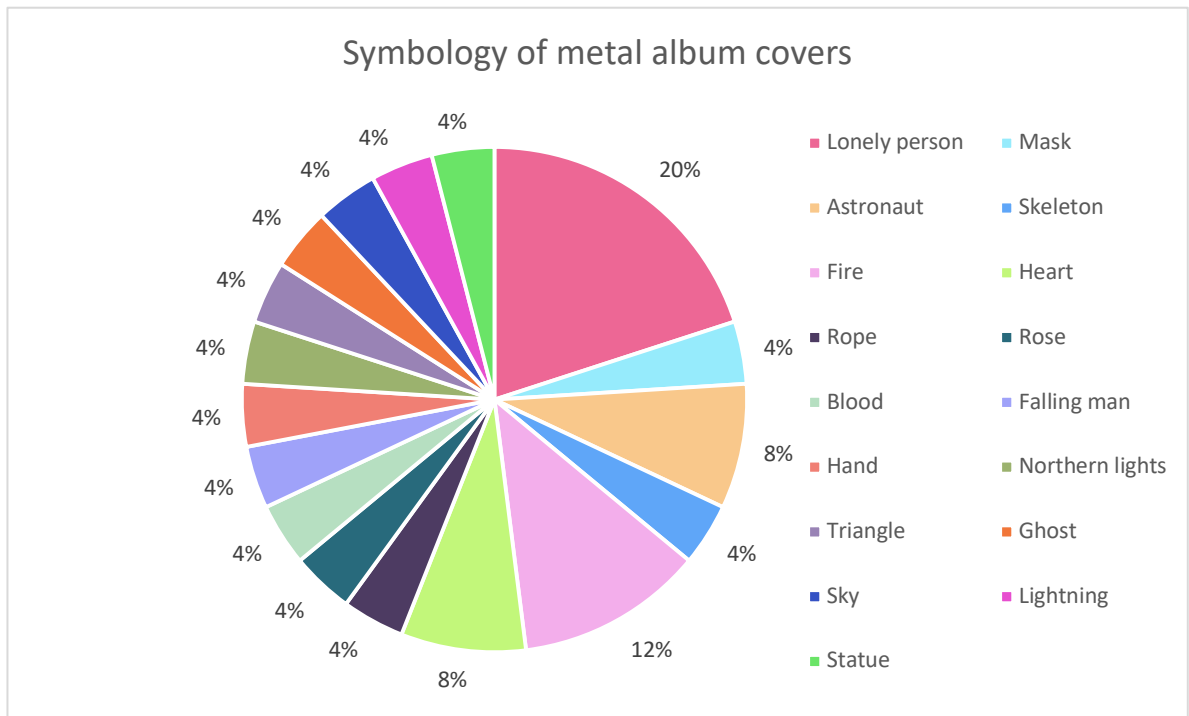
Figure 7.

Typography of metal album covers

- Serif (Modern) — 6%
- Sans serif (Geometric) — 6%
- Sans serif (Neo-Grotesque) — 41%
- Script (Blackletter) — 6%
- Display — 41%
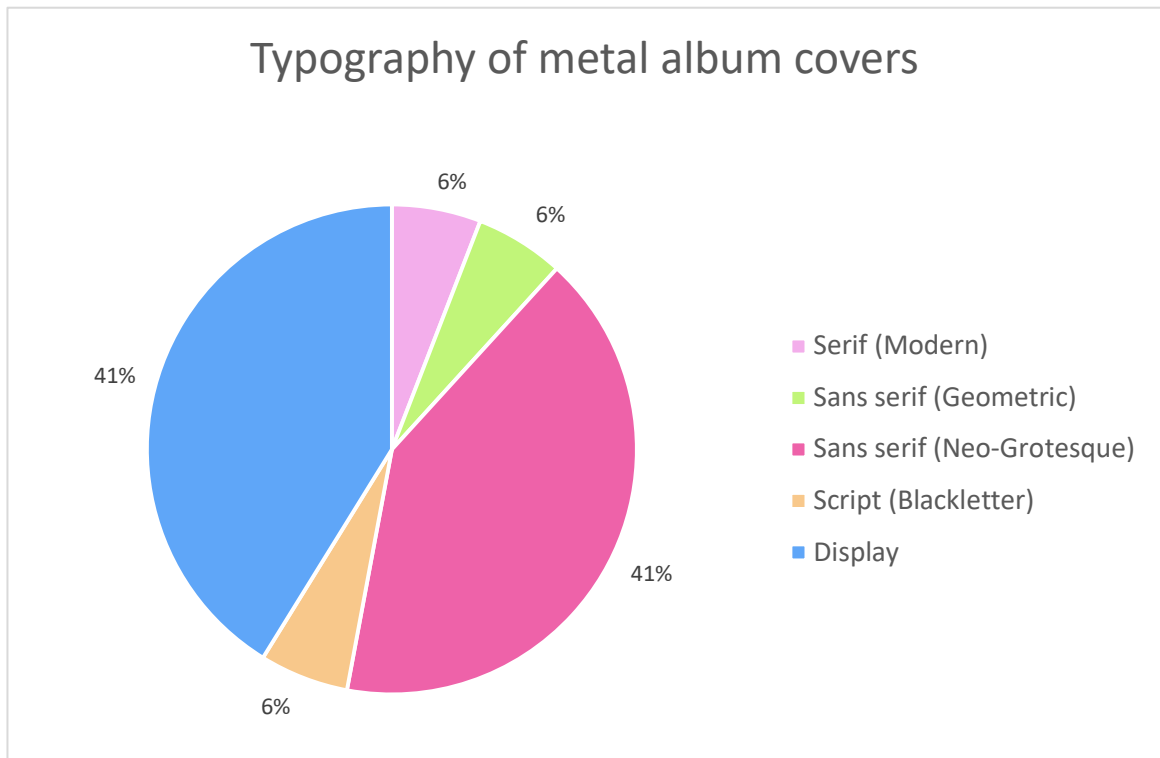
Note. Own work

After the analysis of fifteen international metal album covers, 17 different symbols were identified. The most popular symbol became a **lonely person** which was shown **5 times (20%)**. The symbol of **fire** was chosen less – only **3 times (12%)**. The third place was shared by an **astronaut** and a **heart**, each of which was featured on **two** albums taking up to **8%** of the total.

Summing up, we can see that the main themes of metal album artwork are **loneliness**, **purification** and **destruction**, **dreams** and **freedom**, and **love**.

Figure 8.

Symbology of metal album covers

Legend:
- Lonely person
- Mask
- Astronaut
- Skeleton
- Fire
- Heart
- Rope
- Rose
- Blood
- Falling man
- Hand
- Northern lights
- Triangle
- Ghost
- Sky
- Lightning
- Statue

Values shown: 20%, 4%, 4%, 8%, 4%, 12%, 8%, 4%, 4%, 4%, 4%, 4%, 4%, 4%, 4%, 4%, 4%

Note. Own work

Overall analysis

The results of the analyses of 15 alternative rock albums and 15 metal album covers helped us come to certain conclusions that were not obvious until now.

Illustration style

Alternative rock makes more use of illustrated and photographic illustration styles. At the same time, metal artists are focusing on the photographic style, as well as using more varieties of illustration styles.

Colors

The palette of alternative rock album artworks consists of 11 colors, however, only 3 colors are predominant (more than 15%): black, blue, and red. Metal also uses a palette of 11 colors but has a completely different situation where the most predominant colors are only white and black.

Typography

Alternative rock uses a rich variety of typographies – 11 variants can be seen in the presented albums, among which the most used are Display and Sans Serif Neo-Grotesque. Metal albums cannot show the same variety as they mostly use only 5 different typefaces. Among them, Display and Sans Serif Neo-Grotesque also turned out to be the most popular.

Symbology

There are 21 different symbols used in the prepared samples of alternative rock album artworks, but the symbol of the lonely person became the most popular, which was accompanied by the symbols of the statue and the fire. In the metal album covers, the number of symbols decreased, there are only 17 of them. Among them, the lonely person symbol was also in the lead, followed immediately by the symbol of the fire, and after the symbol of the astronaut.

THE PROCESS OF COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

For our investigation, we decided to create a questionnaire to collect some quantitative information that had to help us prove the hypothesis.

Definition of the questions to be asked

For the present project was elaborated a questionnaire that consists of three blocks:

1. Block with social-demographic questions.

This block with social-demographic questions allows us to better understand our audience and some of their characteristics.

Here we prepared three general questions with one answer option:

- What is your gender?
    - "Female".
    - "Male".
- How old are you?
    - "Under 18".
    - "18-24".
    - "25-34".
    - "35-45".
    - "Over 45".
- Where are you from?
    - A dropdown list of all countries.

2. Block "album cover definition".

In that part of the questionnaire, we wanted to know whether people can detect alternative rock and metal musical genres just by looking at 30 album covers that we already analyzed in the previous paragraph.

There were only two multiple-choice questions:

- Which album covers belong to alternative rock?

- Which album covers belong to metal?

To answer these questions the respondents had to choose at least one image of the album artwork out of 30.

3. Block "album cover attractiveness".

For the last, we wanted to know which album covers are more attractive for the respondents than others to understand which album covers have a better visual identity. Here were also presented 30 album covers from the previous paragraph.

Here we asked only one multiple-choice question:

- Which album covers do you visually like the most?

To answer this question the respondents had to choose at least one image of the album artwork out of 30.

RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE AND MAIN CONCLUSIONS

We concluded that album artwork and little details, such as illustration style, colors, typography, and symbology, have a very important role in the visual identification of music and genres. Their presence and, moreover, their combination greatly affect the person in the moment of choosing the musical album to listen to: if the musician chooses one wrong detail, he will not be able to "sell" his music and gain as many fans as possible. In order to establish these details, that make important parts of the album covers, we set a specific objective:

SO1. Carry out a visual content analysis of fifteen international alternative rock album covers and fifteen international metal album covers.

This way we succeeded in identifying what illustration styles, colors, typographies, and symbols are commonly used in alternative rock and metal album covers. Even though both musical genres have their similarities in both music and visual identity, they still have specific characteristics that make them different. To prove the received results we set two other specific objectives which are:

SO2. Create and conduct a questionnaire with over 100 persons of different ages, genders, and nationalities to know whether they can recognize a musical genre by seeing only the album cover.

SO3. Create and conduct a questionnaire with over 100 persons of different ages, genders, and nationalities to know what album covers have a better visual identity and attract more people.

To achieve the last two objectives, we created a Google Forms-based questionnaire in which a person of any gender, age, and nationality could take part. Thus, we received 109 responses and got an exceptional opportunity to analyze the results obtained and draw certain conclusions.

As described in the previous paragraph, respondents were asked to answer 6 questions, 3 of which belonged to the social-demographic questions block, 2 questions from the "album cover definition" block, and 1 question from the "album cover attractiveness" block.

For a more convenient filling of the questions, as well as for a greater dispersion of the contingent of respondents, this questionnaire was posted on various social media sites and forums, university announcements, and also sent via personal messages:
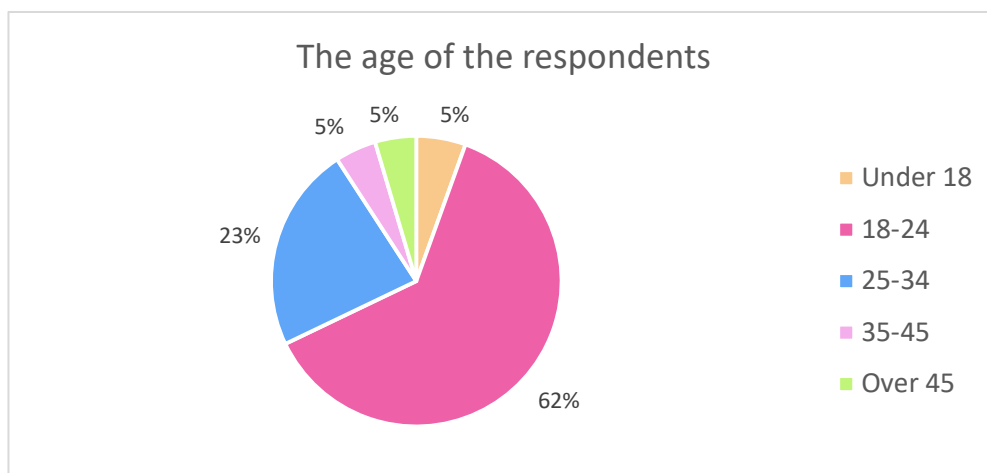
- VK;
- Facebook;
- Twitter;
- Instagram;
- Interpals;
- The Student Room;
- UACloud.

Block with social-demographic questions

109 respondents took part in the questionnaire: 64 women (58.7%) and 45 men (41,3%). Among them, 5 age groups were determined:

- Under 18 (6 persons);
- 18-24 (68 persons);
- 25-34 (25 persons);
- 35-45 (5 persons);
- Over 45 (5 persons).

Figure 9.

Note. Own work

We were able to identify 24 countries where the respondents come from:

- Argentina (1 person);
- Bangladesh (1 person);
- Belarus (2 persons);
- Belgium (1 person);
- Chile (3 persons);
- China (1 person);
- Colombia (3 persons);
- Costa Rica (1 person);
- Cuba (1 person);
- Czech Republic (11 persons);
- Estonia (1 person);
- France (4 persons);
- Germany (7 persons);
- Greece (1 person);
- Italy (1 person);
- Japan (1 person);
- the Netherlands (1 person);
- New Zealand (1 person);
- Russia (31 persons);
- Slovakia (4 persons);
- Spain (19 persons);
- the United Kingdom (8 persons);
- the United States (4 persons);
- Venezuela (1 person).

Figure 10.
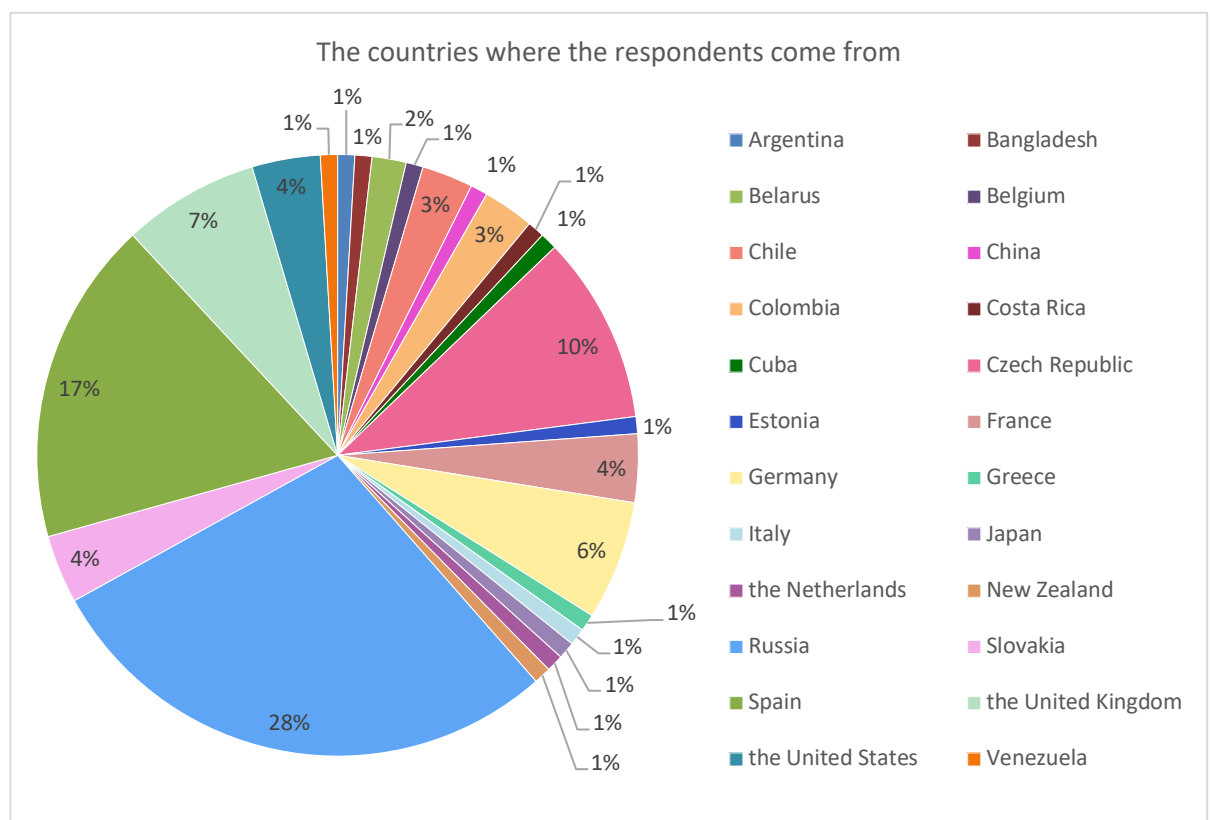
Note. Own work

Block "album cover definition"

In the current block, the respondents were asked to answer two questions: "Which album covers belong to alternative rock?" and "Which album covers belong to metal?". This part helped us to understand whether people can distinguish between two similar musical genres by seeing only album artworks.

As we predicted, the majority of the album covers – 21 – were identified correctly without any problems. The respondents could clearly see different special characteristics that belong either to one musical genre or to another one. But it is also important to say that some artworks managed to puzzle the respondents, within both alternative rock and metal album covers.

Among 15 alternative rock albums, only 5 artworks were identified as metal:

- Chase Atlantic – BEAUTY IN DEATH
- Smash Into Pieces – Broken Parts
- Paleskin – Joy is Temporary, Pain is Constant
- Outline In Color – Imposter Syndrome, Pt. 2
- Lowborn – Devil

Different visual elements such as a typeface Script (Blackletter), a symbol of devil and cyborg, and black and white colors confused the respondents. It is fair to say that mostly the percentage difference between alternative rock and metal is not huge except for an album cover of Outline In Color – Imposter Syndrome, Pt. 2. This album cover was the most confusing due to its typography which looks gothic and can be identified as a crucial part of metal album artwork.

Figure 11. Album cover definition. Alternative rock.

Alt-Rock		Metal
58,7 %		7,3 %
30,3 %		34,9 %
26,6 %		10,1 %
23,9 %		11,9 %
33,9 %		13,8 %
32,1 %		8,3 %
24,8 %		9,2 %
40,4 %		30,3 %
20,2 %		22,9 %
38,5 %		23,9 %
29,4 %		32,1 %
30,3 %		42,2 %
22 %		25,7 %
32,1 %		10,1 %
31,2 %		20,2 %
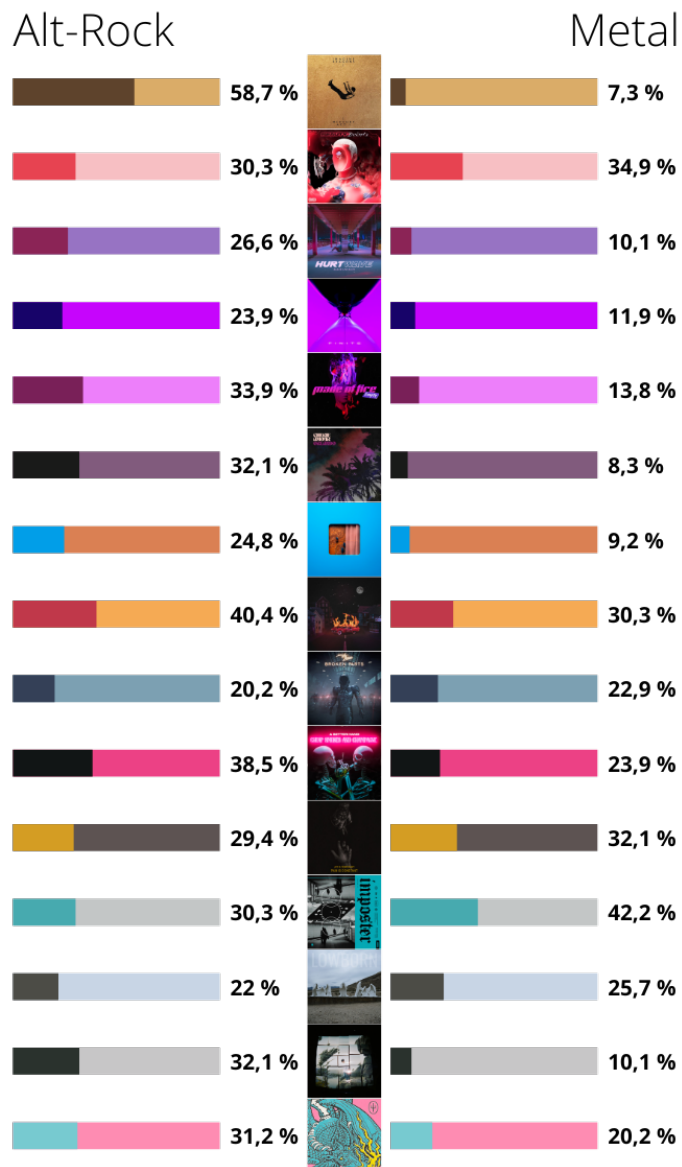
Note. Own work

Among 15 metal album covers, only 4 artworks were identified as alternative rock:

- Architects – For Those That Wish to Exist
- Patient Sixty-Seven – Home Truths
- We Came As Romans – Black Hole (feat. Caleb Shomo)
- Annisokay – Aurora

Different symbols such as falling man, astronaut, and rose made the respondents believe that the following album artworks belong not to metal but to alternative rock.

We should note that only two album covers were the most confusing: Architects – For Those That Wish to Exist and Patient Sixty-Seven – Home Truths. We think that the reason might lie in the combination of the chosen colors and themes that represent the symbols – lonely men.

Figure 12. Album cover definition. Metal.
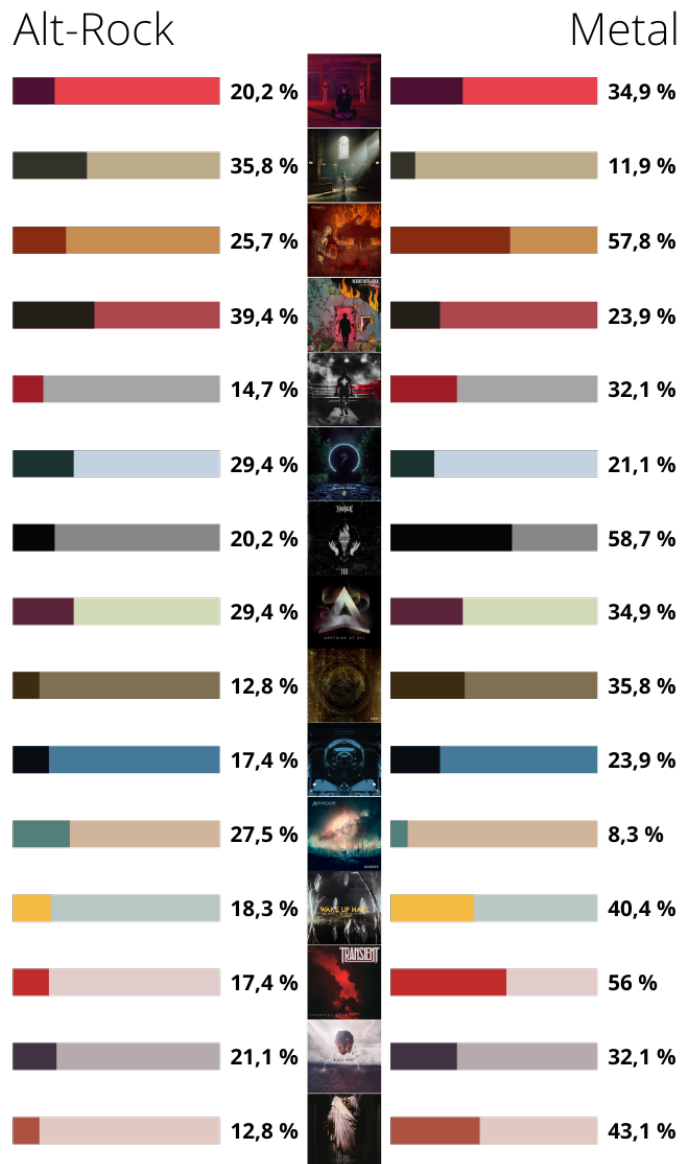
Note. Own work

Block "album cover attractiveness"

As it was said before, the presented design of the album cover has a huge emotional impact on the person who is going to listen to music because it affects his associations

and stereotypes. If the chosen image for the album cover is successful, it will definitely attract many more people, even those who are not interested in alternative rock or metal music.

The visual part of the music is what the listener interacts the most with, which subsequently becomes a bridge from the artwork to the music itself. And this is what we wanted to see in the current block – what album covers could attract and interest the biggest part of the respondents that later would like to discover the music behind these artworks.

In the current block, we could detect 5 leading album artworks that gained more than 25% of likes:

- Architects – For Those That Wish to Exist
- Imagine Dragons – Mercury – Act 1
- Mouth Culture – Bonnie and Clyde
- Cherie Amour – Orlando
- Lowborn – Devil

They all have interesting compositions and hidden ideas that the listener tries to understand. 4 album artworks out of 5 belong to alternative rock which means that alt-rock musicians put more effort into the visual identity of the album cover and they easier catch an eye of the person.

We also noticed that the albums that were selected least of all were those that either did not have a wide variety of tones or a clear idea of what the artists wanted to convey to the listeners: an abstract style of illustration, as well as images that seem not to have any story behind that could attract. They simply did not catch the attention due to the difficulty of their understanding, monotones, or the very dark colors of the artworks, which mostly were black and red or black and blue.

Figure 13.

Album cover attractiveness

	35,8 %		11 %
	22 %		39,4 %
	22,9 %		24,8 %
	19,3 %		21,1 %
	11,9 %		8,3 %
	26,6 %		21,1 %
	20,2 %		17,4 %
	27,5 %		9,2 %
	13,8 %		17,4 %
	23,9 %		6,4 %
	18,3 %		23,9 %
	11,9 %		10,1 %
	25,7 %		7,3 %
	16,5 %		14,7 %
	23,9 %		22,9 %
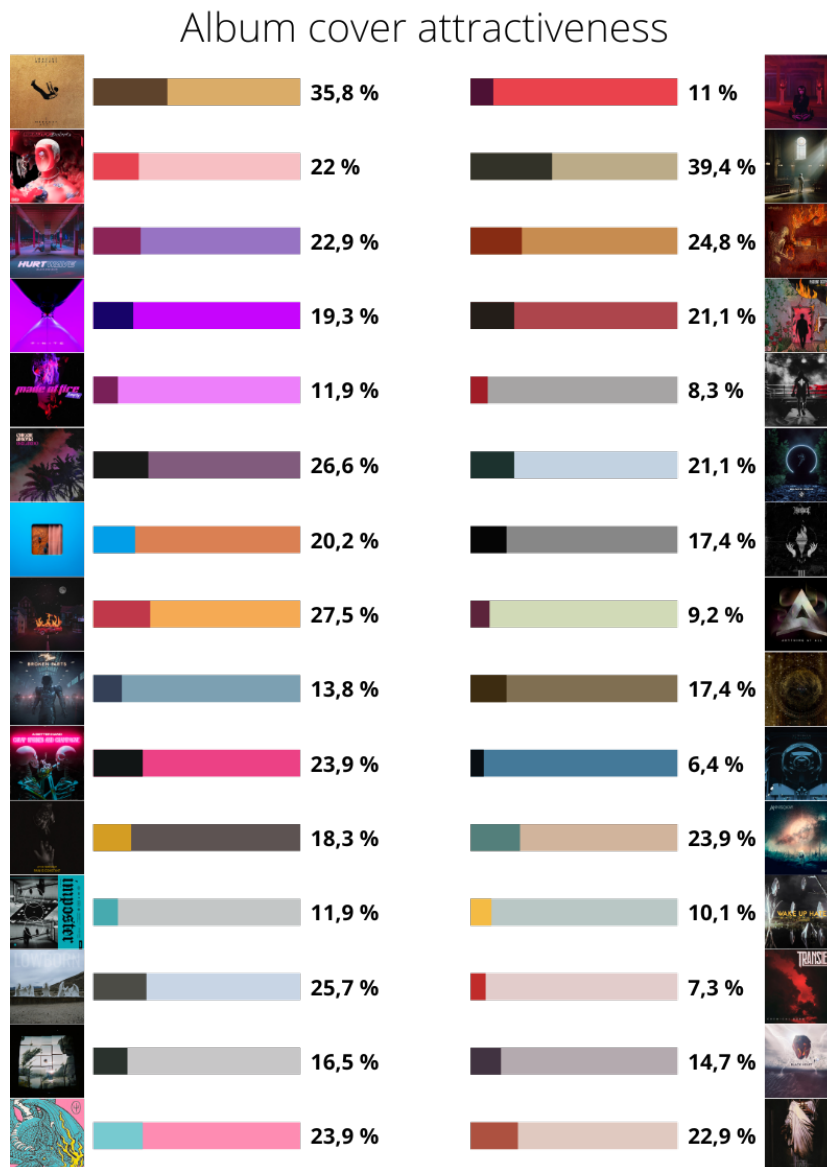
Note. Own work

Our research has proven that visually alternative rock and metal can be very similar, especially when it comes to symbolism. However, if we go into the details and consider each of them profoundly, it is possible to notice significant differences in the illustration style, colors, typography, and frequency of occurrence of a particular symbol. All these details, being brought up together, form the unique visual style of the musical genre which almost does not let the person confuse it with any other. And this was shown by our questionnaire, in which several albums – only 9 out of 30 – were misidentified. Also, we could see that there are details that can either attract the listener or, on the

contrary, repel him. Colorful album artworks that depict an interesting story are certainly more appealing than the ones with dull tones and difficult images.

This all proves our hypothesis that, even though these two genres are quite close to each other and might have the same elements, each has its own distinctive features, which both indicate the musical genre and can attract more fans – it all depends on how these elements are connected with each other. The visual identity has a very important role in the moment of the choice of music. Even though the format of the design has changed drastically – from the vinyl LPs and CDs to the digital and online playlists, animated album covers, and even merchandising – its value has not changed and, most probably, it will increase because nowadays it is impossible to imagine our lives without music and its visualization. Maybe in the next 10-20 years, we will become the pioneers and experience new ways of representing music.

Thanks to this project, I concluded that the visual identity of album covers has a very important role in the moment of choosing music. It was possible to be done with a help of visual content analysis which showed us different details that cannot be noticed on a regular basis. It was very interesting to work on this project, even though there is not a lot of detailed information about visual content analysis concerning different artworks, such as album covers, paintings, etc., and important steps on how to complete it profoundly. I believe that this work will serve me very well in my professional future because during my master's studies I realized that I want to connect it with design, with UI/UX design specifically. Also, in the future, I would like to continue my research in the field of design and branding which means that my next research can be done about the design of the artist's websites and their social media which also have a huge impact on their promotion.

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ATTACHMENTS

The description of the questionnaire.

Visual Content Analysis of Alternative Rock and Metal Album Covers of the Year 2021

The following questionnaire is carried out for academic purposes for the final project of the master's degree in Communication and Creative Industries at the University of Alicante.

The data is collected solely and exclusively for research-academic purposes. In no case will the personal data of the people, who answer this questionnaire, be collected or made public.

Thank you for your help and attention!

ez15@gcloud.ua.es (без совместного доступа)
Сменить аккаунт

* Обязательно

Block with social-demographic questions

1. What is your gender? *

○ Female

○ Male

2. How old are you? *

○ Under 18

○ 18-24

○ 25-34

○ 35-45

○ Over 45

3. Where are you from? *

Выбрать ▼

Block "album cover definition"

Album Cover Definition

In that part of the poll, we'd like to know whether you can detect alternative rock and metal musical genres just by looking at the following album covers.

1. Which album covers belong to alternative rock? *

2. Which album covers belong to metal? *

Block "album cover attractiveness"

Answers for the blocks "album cover definition" and "album cover attractiveness"

1.

2.
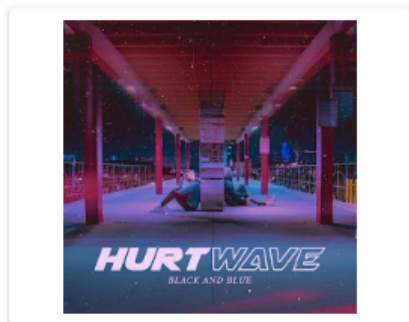
3.
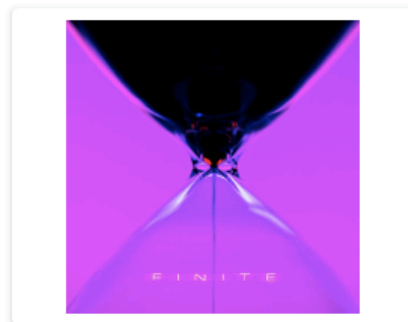
4.

☐ 5.
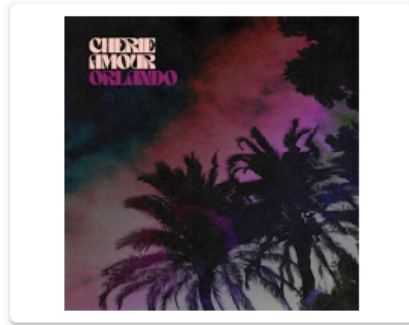
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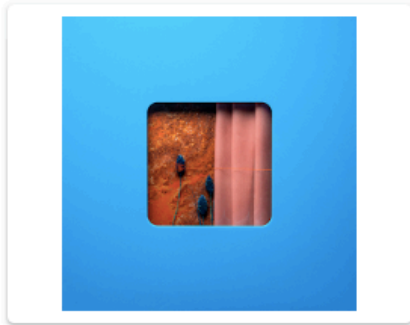
☐ 7.
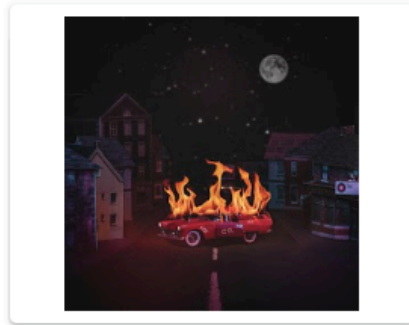
☐ 8.
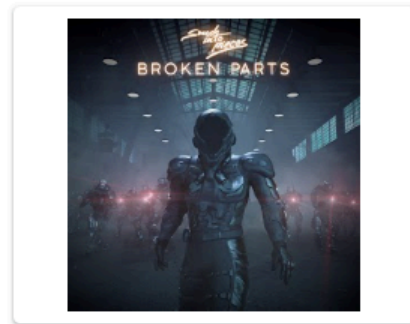
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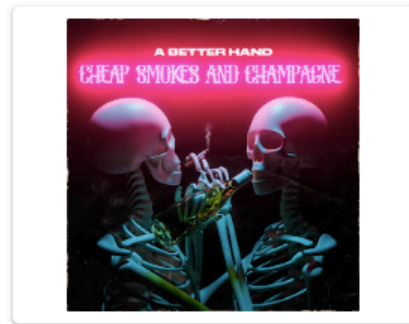
☐ 10.

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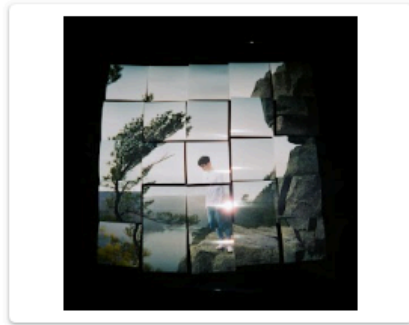
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☐ 15.
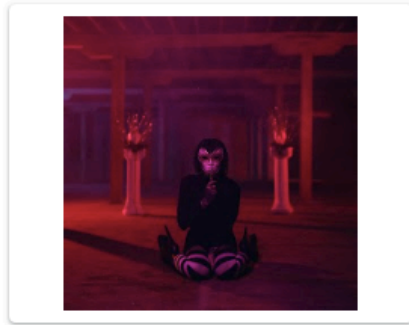
☐ 16.
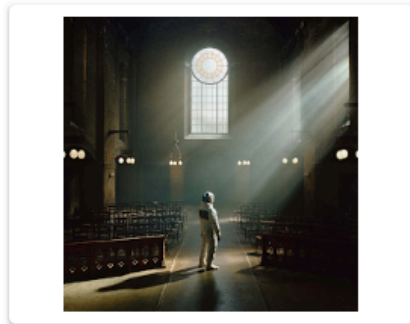
☐ 17.

☐ 18.

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