

The Logo Type *El logotipo tipo*

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Abstract: This paper presents the typical sign of identity—the logotype—used by Spanish media in Spain during the first decade of the twenty-first century. The logotype was defined after studying a sample of 130 visual signs of corporate identity either designed or re-designed before 2010. The analysis of the signs was carried out using a tool designed as part of the doctoral research to measure trends in the visual sign of corporate identity. The results show a trend in the sample which fits the description of the index—according to Peirce—in which the communicative values of the context of use predominate. This tendency highlights a denotative form of representation, which we interpret as the need to anchor ourselves to the AFK reality (away from the keyboard reality) which nowadays is digital, interactive and changing.

Keyword: logotype; semiotics; trend; media branding

Resumen: En esta comunicación se presenta el signo de identidad típico –logotipo tipo– usado por los medios de comunicación del estado español en la primera década de siglo XXI. El logotipo tipo se ha determinado a través del estudio de una muestra de 130 signos de identidad visual corporativa diseñados o rediseñados después del año 2000 y antes de 2010. El análisis de los signos se ha llevado a cabo mediante una herramienta desarrollada como investigación doctoral para medir las tendencias en el diseño del signo visual de identidad corporativa. Los resultados ponen de manifiesto una tendencia en la muestra que encaja con la descripción de índice –según Peirce– en el que predominan los valores comunicativos del contexto de uso. Dicha tendencia pone en relieve una manera de representar denotativa, que interpretamos como la necesidad de anclarse a una realidad AFK (away from keyboard) que se caracteriza por ser digital, interactiva y cambiante.

Palabras clave: logotipo; semiótica; tendencia; marca

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This comparative study aims to define a typical map of visual corporate identity (VCI) signs used in the media during the first decade of the twenty-first century in Spain. It enable us to identify visually this period, and evaluate some changes associated with the emergence of new media. We explain it as the visual dimation of shift we can find in marketing, branding and graphic design at the end of the nineteen nineties.

Although the first voices of change appeared almost twenty years earlier than the visuals we present here, there are elements that have endured either as a result of their close territorial or temporal proximity to the source of origin. The first indications of change can be seen in 1996 and were described as discontinuities in design practice in case studies, identity programmes and finally articles which appeared in the design- and marketing-related publications in the United States and the United Kingdom¹ (Hollins 2000, Shida 1996). Later on we find references to our cultural context, as the introduction of internet in Spanish homes² took hold (Costa 2004, Delfín 2008, Solas 2002). Finally, we include recent references in the context of the English-speaking world from a socio semiotic perspective, which identifies the use of new media as a globalisation phenomenon (Birdshall y Murphy 2003, Thurlow and Aiello 2006).

Changes attributed to the use of new media have been forecast in relation to the different changes in the design of VCI. The technical and economic framework is full of examples of those changes, such as that identified by Néstor Garcia Canclini with the increase of companies operating on line and which modify their models to a global scale (Garcia Canclini 1999, 11). Since the environments where these brands are applied are basically digital and interactive but identity management continues in the hands of more conventional media, brands forged on old models have to be re-designed (Kathman 2002, 24). And this needs to be done taking into account the discursive peculiarities of the new media, which internet innovation and strategy specialist Adam R. Kallish states, involve the creation of non-linear resources as a knowledge base (Kallish 2000, 39). The speed at which digital development and the role of information technologies—with internet being the main example—have meant a type of visual discourse on line which has brought with it new models of behaviour and interaction. Users are no longer passive receivers but participate actively in the information they consume. Doblin Group used the neologism “prosumer” to identify users who consume information but also produce their own (Doblin Group 1996, 41).

So, in an environment where information is consumed as a product it is not surprising to find VCI signs taking on a tangible, objectual dimension. Kallish relates this to the removal of borders between products and service on line (Kallish 2000, 42), while corporate consultant R.O. Swinehart links it to the development of designing “virtual identity” where all the logotypes and brands are related in a complex network where the nature of the corporations themselves is constantly changing (Swinehart 1996, 68). Any company wanting to communicate values of cutting-edge innovation and technology should bear in mind that those values are related to models of on-line communication (Machin 2004, 316). So, we consider that VCI signs must be the tip of a very deeply rooted iceberg of change.

THE LOGO TYPE

As we mentioned before, more than analysing the depth of changes which have occurred or are occurring in the VCI design sector, the question that arises is whether changes in the way people work have also modified the way they should be represented (Bartomeu 2012). Are these changes in VCI visible?

1. The special edition “Identity in a Digital World” of Design Management Review, volume 7, in 1996 by the Design Management Journal should be mentioned as a base point for studies which identify the changes with applied strategies and/or proposals. From this publication, we would highlight the articles by the Doblin Group and Ted Shida with “Corporate Identity: what’s next” and “Corporate Identity and the world wide web”, respectively.

2. In 1997 the United States began to compile an index of the introduction of internet into private homes, and at 18% it had a higher figure than Spain in the year 2000. In 1998 this rose to 26.2% and in the year 2000 44% of US homes had an internet connection (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

To answer that question we have defined the visual identity sign as the object of study and we will understand design as a communicative fact. Within the range of communicative facts, the VCI sign is projected as one of greater endurance, making it idea for resistance to new trends, as authors C. Thurlow and M. Aiello confirm (Thurlow and Aiello 2007, 311).

Visual communication trends occur constantly. As each one disappears it leaves a stylistic footprint which designers use as graphic resources (Calvera 1996, 37) including them in different statements to steer a series of meanings which will be socially lasting, beyond the life of the trend itself. In the same way, we can say that no trend is entirely temporary or entirely innocent. It is trends that, like chains of representation, give shape and sense to the graphic resources used by designers in their daily work.

Theoretical framework

To understand the implications of trends in sign design we set out from the premise that all design is a visual discourse. This premise is supported in three main arguments by F.X. Ruiz Collantes on the semiotic analysis of advertising messages (Ruiz Collantes 2000, 216): visual discourse is a message with varying levels of complexity, which mixes different languages and offers its own methodology to the analysis of trends.

The Documentary Analysis Matrix was developed on the basis of the previous arguments (Bartomeu 2016). This is an instrument which enables visual discourse analysis from a semiotic perspective. The tool is limited to the analysis of the VCI sign and is functional as an instrumental model.

The tool is based theoretically on sociosemiotics (Thurlow and Aiello 2006), and includes techniques which come from professional design practice (Costa 2004, Chaves 2001), as well as academic (González Solas 2002, Fernández Iñurritegui 2007) and legal work—the classes of Nice and Vienna—in a structuralist approach to the sign (Greimas and Courtés 1982) as visual discourse in which different levels of complexity and different languages are used (Ruiz Collantes 2000).

To carry out an analysis of the visual discourse of signs we rationalised and atomised their parts, differentiating the viewpoints from which to do the analysis. The different approaches allowed us to integrate the discursive elements of the sign understood as an integrating structure of meaning (Greimas 1973, 30). So, the message is understood as a collection of deep and superficial levels of meaning, with the more abstract ideas lying at the deeper levels and the more concrete and perceptible meanings at the more superficial levels. The most abstract level can be expressed in verbal language and the most concrete through forms colours, typographies and other elements of visual language.

Once the theoretical foundations have been organised and the analytical techniques articulated, we have a tool consisting of three Levels and six Blocks, establishing correlations between the analytical techniques and initial sign units as can be seen in Figure 1.

	<i>Analytical Techniques</i>	<i>Levels</i>	<i>Initial Sign Units</i>
<i>Block 1. General overview</i>	Primary and secondary identifiers. Latency analysis.	Pragmatic	Primary and secondary VCI identifying sign
<i>Block 2. Reference, iconicity and rhetorical analysis</i>	Evaluation of the reference and the referential subject. Linguistic identification. Iconicity of form, colour and texture. Semantic rhetoric of the logotype reference and graphotype, rhetoric of the correspondence between form and content.	Level 3. Rhetorical	logotype, graphotype and mixed sign
<i>Block 3. Rhetorical analysis of the VCI sign</i>	Rhetoric of the logotype, graphotype and mixed sign. Construction of the logotype, graphotype and mixed sign.	Level 3. Rhetorical	logotype, graphotype and mixed sign
<i>Block 4. Syntactical rhetorical analysis of the VCI sign</i>	Rhetoric of the logotype, graphotype and mixed sign	Level 3. Rhetorical	logotype, graphotype and mixed sign
<i>Block 5. Morphological analysis of the iconographic, chromatic and typographic sign</i>	Evaluation of units, structures, relations and adhesions of the typographic sign. Connotative and denotative identification of the iconographic sign. Evaluation of units, structures and relation of the chromatic sign.	Level 2. Iconic	iconographics, chromatics and typographics
<i>Block 6. Analysis of the plastic sign</i>	Evaluation of units, subunits, structures and relations of the plastic sign.	Level 1. Pre-iconic	form, colour, texture

Figure 1

Documentary Analysis Matrix. Source: Data Adapted from Author's Surname 2012.

The analytical techniques are a compilation of knowledge that allow us to tag and classify the parts of the sign. For instance (see part of the sample in Figure 2), in the most abstract level we can assess who the issuer is, as private or public (Antena 3 vs. Rne), local or global (TV3 vs. Disney Channel), etc. It will place us in Block 2 of the Matrix, making the valuation of the referent and the referential subject of the sign. We can also find brand linguistic referents, as descriptive or symbolic (Telefónica vs. Terra Networks), etc. and it will place us as well in the Block 2, analyzing the linguistic identification of the brand. Going deeper into the tool we can identify the visual parts of the sign as typographical (Yoigo, Telecinco, Canal 33) iconographic (Telecinco, Canal 33) or chromatic (Yoigo, Telecinco), and we would be in Block 5. In Block 6, the most concrete part, we determine for instance the chromatic key, as high (Telecinco) or low (Yoigo).



Figure 2

Part of the Sample. Source: author own set of images using logotypes designed by various authors 2012.

The initial sign units are starting points of the analysis. By choosing one you define the point in the system of meanings where analysis begins. Depending on the focus of each section, a semantic, syntactic, rhetorical or pragmatic analysis of the sign may be carried out. For example, we can center on the level of expression of the sign and carry out a semantic analysis as a reductive process of semes that establish relations between units of meaning and also with visual-type perceptive units (Ruiz Collantes, 1998: 216) placing us in Block 2, Level 3.

The Levels are differentiated by analytical intentions, present at the time of analysing the VCI sign. We established three levels, as the pre-iconic level (Groupe μ 1993), the iconic level (Eco 1972, 1985) and the rhetorical level (Barthes 1986).

The matrix allows atomisation of the VCI sign through its 23 analytical techniques, giving 123 variables, which may take a total of 617 values (Figure 3). As explained before, in the analytical technique "Referent Assess", we can define the issuer of a visual Identity sign as local or global. In this example, "the issuer" is a variable, whereas "local" or "global" are values. In same lines we find the "Chromatic key". It is a variable that relates chromatic parts of a sign. The relation is not perceptive, which answers to a mathematical rule, and can be stated as part of the plastic sign. It has two values "high" and "low". The high key is the undifferentiation, the vagueness. The low key is the depth, the containment (Gonzalez Solas 2002, 181).

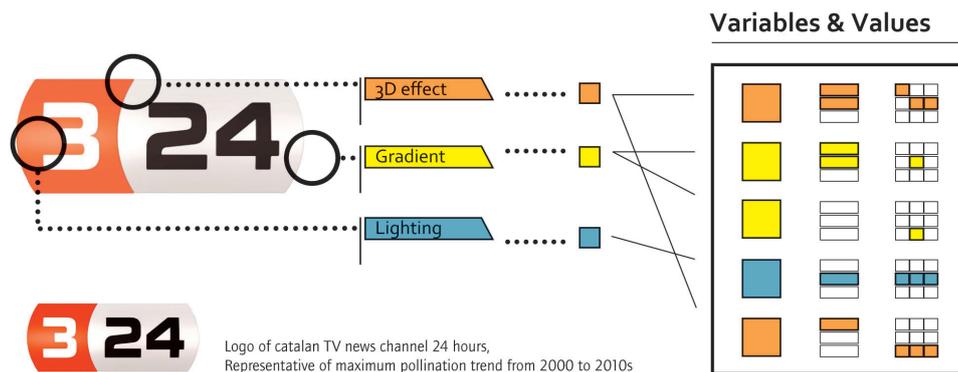


Figure 3
Diagram of the Matrix. Source: Bartomeu, 2016.

Methodology

This study uses the Documentary Analysis Matrix to analyse a sample and determine the profile type of 130 signs used in the media sector in Spain between 2000 and 2010.

We chose a random sample (A. Sobrino in González Solas 2002, 188). The randomness indicates that signs were not selected for having been designed by professionals. Although it was not a probabilistic sample, we fix the margin of error and the level of confidence to orientate the precision of the results. The error factor was 8.8% in relation to the principle of maximum uncertainty. The analysis was carried out by counting most repetition variables and values. This count allowed us to describe the profile type of sign.

In this direction we compared the profile type with the Pollination tendency (Bartomeu 2016). Pollination is manifested as the statistical trend estimation within the sample of signs, with visual indicators of the use of new media, and significant for 75-93% of the VCI signs designed after the year 2000³. Data considered relevant was that which allowed the sign to be evaluated in relation to its context. Finally, the study included a discussion of the results related to the concepts in the theoretical framework and the techno-economic context where we localised the initial changes. It allowed us to establish the significance of the results.

RESULTS

To visually relate the elements of the matrix with the results we use Figure 4: a) with the VCI signs that exemplifies the typical profile in the sample and b) with signs in the statistical trend estimation.

3. Pollination was statistically determined using the pollination index and the trend and tendency tests (Glass and Stanley 1986, 58). Between 82.2% and 98.8% of signs re-designed after the year 2000 were seen to be pollinated. And from the year 2000 between 75% and 93% of designers showed indications of pollination. We also measured the efficiency of the Matrix as an instrument, using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to find the reliability of the tool, with a value of 0.88.



Figure 4a

Examples of signs with a typical profile of the sample.

Source: author own set of images using logotypes designed by various authors.



Figure 4b

Examples of signs within the statistical trend estimation of the sample.

Source: author own set of images using logotypes designed by various authors.

On the typological frame of the sample: convergent and in movement

In the analysis of Block 2 the chromatic iconicity coincides with the imaginative use of colour. In Block 3 we highlight the individual rhetorical analysis of the parts of the mixed sign. It worked in the same sense that other rhetoric figures of the whole sign. In Figure 4a we can observe that convergence in three places: 1) in the verbalisation of colour within the naming in the first sign, 2) in the repetition of the icon in the contragraphism of the letters in the second sign, and 3) with the verbalisation of the colour in the logotype of third sign.

In Block 5 we obtained results of the typographical sign where the characters sans serif dominated, with a uniform outline and an axis perpendicular to the base line. The non-sloping lines were combined with the use of bold. The transition between form and typographical line are angled and the predominant characters circular and independent. The first logotype in Figure 4b is the exception, confirming that it belongs to the subgroup of logotypes pollinised by the use of the media and outside the typological profile of the sample.

In Block 6 the predominance of multiple blocked colours in a low chromatic key should be highlighted. The plastic sign is presented as a composite form, with clearly marked borders, high saturation and a horizontal orientation. Its composition coincides with the results in block 4 where the horizontal directionality appears in the syntactical rhetoric of the sign. The distribution of forms is separate and its organisation semi-formal, with an emphasis on the similarity of forms. Again, we see that these requirements of the typical sign are met in Figure 4a, while not all are met in Figure 4b. The significant of plastic sign in Block 6 is the attraction among elements, and movement dominates compositionally, as can be seen in Figure 4a.

On the means of representation: schematic and denotative

The iconographic signs demonstrate uniformity in the scale of iconicity, obtaining maximum values of 16 (description in normalised signs, i.e. characters whose function is illustrative

among the mixed signs in Figure 4a). In the case of typographic signs, the sans serif typographies dominate. The dominant rhetorical figures are the geometrical shapes for logotypes, graphotypes and mixed signs. In the plastic sign, the dominant figures are also geometrical. So, the typical sign has a schematic iconicity and a geometric formalisation. This does not imply that the content is abstract. In Figure 4b we can see the logotype for the 3/24 news channel with the letters—completely conventionalised abstracts—within the iconic representation of a button (Figure 4b). The chromatic representation of the texture, however, is realist and is a clear reference to the screen colour, to the retroillumination of the television. So while the dominant discourse is the geometry, with schematic representations, we seem to be looking at a returning trend for the denotative representation of reality (Figure 4b).

If we analyse the relationship established between the sign and reality we can find an analysis of the motivation of the reference in Block 2. The results show a predominance of signs motivated by a contextual and linguistic reference (93%) both in the typical signs and in the subgroup of the trend. We interpret these data as foreseeable since the logotypes are marked by the use of alphabetic characters and their linguistic motivation is assumed to be high. So the logotype in Figure 4b, where there is a 3 and a 24, refers to the 24-hour news broadcasting on Channel 3 of the television.

Finally, we can add to the count the operation of semantic substitution of the reference by elements of continuity and objectification (present in 15% of the signs, all in the trends subgroup). These signs, like those in Figure 4b, use rhetorical figures which give body to the graphisms, using realistic resources which suggest a return to denotation with low levels of iconicity. The rhetorical figures of structural synthesis with illumination, present in Figure 4b, have 16% repetition and the 3D figure 19%. This shows that there is a trend towards an indicial-type sign, with a denotative way of representing reality.

DISCUSSION

As described in the previous section there is a VCI sign profile in the media that is the result of a trend for the representation of referential signs anchored in their context. Although these are schematic and highly normalised signs there is also a certain pattern for denotative representation of reality. Javier González Solas has also talked about this phenomenon which he calls “index effect” (González Solas 2002, 93). This political scientist relates it to the evolution of the Global Image as a reaction to corporate density and visual competition. He expands on this by citing Tisseron (*ibid.*), with the return to representation focussed on the subject, the sign, the thing that is almost not a sign because it is an indicator of the presence of what is being represented. The most important thing is not meaning but being recognisable in a context.

The “index effect” observed in the Pollination trend subgroup, but also present in the iconographic representation of the entire sample, corresponds typologically to the index sign of Ch. S. Peirce (Peirce 1978, 148). We believe that it makes sense that with the use of new media—media that prioritises the visual—a kind of referential interpretation emerges towards what we might call “digital reality”. We distinguish this reality from analogic reality as gamers do in AFK moments (away from keyboard). As Boellstorff explains AFK seems a banal aspect of cybersociety but there are important theoretical implications for questions of place and time (Boellstorff 2010, 107) as it sets virtual as primary reality, and analogic as secondary reality.

The result of “index effect” is the transfer of identifying elements for digital reality to the analogical world, where we obtain a more referential use of images, reformulated by the users themselves and extended to different non-digital formats and media. As the authors C. Thurlow and M. Aiello explain, the closest thing to the images can be interpreted as a greater social need for “true reality”. And true reality is, in our opinion, an AFK paradox of the digital, interactive and changing environment. So the visual analysis of signs between 2000 and 2010 establishes a plausible relationship with the context of change suggested at the beginning of this study.

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