

Brand Marks' Performance in Digital Media

**Daniel Raposo^{1,2,3}, Ricardo Correia³, Rogério Ribeiro^{1,2,3},
and João Neves^{1,2,3}**

¹CIAUD, Lisbon School of Architecture, Universidade de Lisboa, Rua Sá Nogueira, 1349-063 Lisboa, Portugal

²RETHINK, Research Group on Design for the Territory, Avenida do Empresário, Campus da Talagueira, 6000-767 Castelo Branco, Portugal

³Polytechnic Institute of Castelo Branco, Av. Pedro Álvares Cabral, n° 12, 6000-084 Castelo Branco, Portugal

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to evaluate the graphic resistance and visual performance of Brand Marks in use on websites and social media. It aims to bring knowledge about the impact of digital media on the design of contemporary Brand Marks, but especially the limitations observed in brand trademarks originated during the 20th century or previously. Considering nowadays impact of online and digital communication, the internet of things, and the diversity of multiple screen dimensions, it is important to take a closer look at the performance of Brand Marks on websites, responsive web pages, audio-visuals, and social media. This topic is very relevant when studying or developing flexible systems of brand identification or even Brand Mark variants and respective visual guidelines. Specifically, we intend to observe how the design of Brand Marks and the digital environment compromise the graphic coherence of Visual Identity and brand identification. A systematic methodology was adopted, with a non-interventionist base, with the case study of 32 large and international brands. The results consist in the identification of a set of principles and graphic features which Brand Marks should follow to ensure its recognition, the coherence of Visual Identity and brand identification.

Keywords: Coherence of visual identity, Brand identification, Logotype and symbols in digital media, Favicon and digital avatars, Responsive and flexible brands

FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

To frame this study, it is important to clarify some ideas to ensure a full understanding of the concepts and terms we want to work with and study.

It is therefore important to understand that Branding is the process of creation of the brand as a set of concepts (Sher, 2021), but also includes the action of putting a mark on objects and goods and, the management of the brand image (shaping how people see the brand) (Raposo, Oliveira and Farinha, 2020; Carmi, 2020).

Therefore, a brand is a set of concepts (identity, purpose, values, emotions, and symbols) organized to evoke a desire idea about a person, corporation,

business, product, service, or religion in the mind of audiences and stakeholders (Raposo, 2008). A brand is a set of intangible attributes defined at the intersection between corporate identity, audience expectations and the required characteristics to contrast among the competition (Slade-Brooking, 2016). The brand is an ideologic concept, a set of symbols, arguments and beliefs functioning as an agreement of value proposition to connect emotionally with stakeholders in a way that distinguishing itself from the competition (Olins, 2008; Raposo, Moreira da Silva et al., 2018).

In nowadays understanding, the brand purpose ensures its relevance and value to different stakeholders and defines the business model, products, and services. On the other hand, branding integrates all business dimensions (business management, production process, human resources, public and interpersonal relations, internal and external communication, etc.) to ensure the desired positioning and brand image in a market, culture, and time (Oliveira, 2018).

The brand identity is expressed by brand personality (values, feelings, and expression), concepts that are visualized by the visual identity. The visual identity is a system of graphic elements (brand mark, colours, typography, images, 5th element, graphics, textures, and graphic effects) selected with graphic-symbolic criteria and organised in a strategic way to produce a certain visual language and style. The visual identity system performs different functions, namely identifying and differentiating the brand from competitors, to ensure consistency and flexibility in visual brand communication across different media and over time and, as well, to express the brand personality (Raposo, 2012; Airey, 2019).

Different messages are communicated over time in different media and advertising, generating perceptions. Often, secondary meanings and associations are generated and linked to the brand mark (also named as logo, although it is an inaccurate designation because it derives from logotype) and other visual identity elements, even if these were not included at the time of their design (Raposo, 2012; Raposo, Laginha et al., 2020).

Once this framework is established, it is important to clarify that the brand mark is a key element of the visual identity, but still an element of a visual language system. The brand mark is not the visual identity (Raposo, 2012; Oliveira 2018; Carmi 2020; Sher 2021; Shumate 2021; Slade-Brooking, 2016).

Brand marks are devices used to represent, identify and distinguish a brand in its communications, products or services compared to its competitors (Bokhua, 2022). Brand marks are used to signalling authorship, ownership, to identify a group of people, an entity (Castro, 2021). When used to differentiate brands, products or services with commercial purposes, brand marks may be designated as trademarks (Interbrand 2007; Raposo, 2008/2012; Raposo, Ribeiro et al, 2020; Raposo, Moreira da Silva et al., 2021).

In summary, a brand can be imagined, recalled, and described in words, it has a dimension (number of people who know it) and a certain value (equity), but it does not have a material existence. On the other hand, brand marks can be seen, touched, printed, stamped, engraved, and registered to ensure industrial property (Costa 2001; Raposo, Neves et al., 2016).

In terms of semiotics, the brand mark is the sign itself (representamen) and its object is always the brand (object), meanwhile the interpretant is the brand image (the perceived brand) (Costa 2001; Raposo, Neves and Silva, 2017).

The brand mark works as the brand signature, standing for the brand (in its representation, evoking it) in all visible media, namely machinery, products, buildings, uniforms and textiles, signage, stationary, merchandising, advertising and visual communication, audio-visuals, and digital media (Rijo, 2022; Pereira et al., 2023). Brand marks can be logotypes (graphic representation of the name using letters. Examples: IBM, Coca-Cola, and Sony), by symbol (representation of a real or abstract letter, object, entity, or idea. Examples: Louis Vuitton, Apple, Nike, Puma); or by logotype and symbol combination (symbol with logotype. Example: BP, Toyota, Mercedes-Benz; or logotype with symbol. Example: Amazon, Ford, City Bank) (Raposo, Moreira da Silva et al. 2022).

Even specialised literature presents problems or inconsistencies in the use of specific terms to designate brand marks and its typologies, which adds confusion to an already complex subject. To illustrate this issue, we can observe the case of Logotypes (to us includes wordmark, lettering, monogram) and Symbol (to us includes figurative, iconic, pictorial, letterform, abstract, pictogram, mascots, emblems, isotype); combination mark (to us includes symbol and logotype, combo, isologo, imagotype) or dynamic identities (systemics, fluids, mutant, metamorphic, fluid, responsive).

It's the market requirements and brand communication needs that dictate the brand mark to be highly contrasting and scalable so that it can be used in various dimensions and quickly recognized in different media: architectural, physical, printed, audio-visual, and digital (Shaoqiang, 2018).

About the requirements of a brand mark, Chen, Cai, Huang, and Kuo (2003), point out the notion of balance/symmetry and Contrast, while Georgiev, Nagai, Taura and Morita (2007) consider that a brand mark must have parts that allow its identification. White (2017) and Shumate (2021) refer the need to function in monochrome and that has uniform mass and contrasting shape of the background and in various formats; the formal and stylistic coherence between subcomponents; the contrast without overlapping components; well-defined forms and with optical alignments; the simplicity with emphasis on components and without details. González Cuéllar, (2020) considers the need for semantic compatibility with the meaning of the brand, scalability, and longevity and Raposo (2022) adds the possibility of visual declination, the contrast, versatility, a long distance recognizable skeleton or structure (and in situations of low vision), balance and shape proportion considering an area close to an imaginary square or circle, its level of schematization or iconicity, the semantic compatibility with the brand and its positioning in the market, the graphic synthesis, and the power of fascination.

Brand communication and a considerable part of commerce takes place in an online context. On the other hand, digital media is particularly demanding if we consider the multiple screen dimensions and display or video resolutions and, as well as the diversity of social networks, each with its own type of operation (Pereira et al., 2023). It is difficult to find a brand that does not have a digital presence, on its own responsive websites, Apps, and through

profiles and pages in social media such as Instagram, Facebook and TikTok. The favicon is a good example of the demand for brand marks in a digital context, but also responsive websites may require greater graphic flexibility or adaptability (Johnson, 2019). For these reasons, designers have adapted brand marks to digital, for example, valuing name initials, ditching logotypes in preference to symbols, designing simplified versions or unique solutions for digital (Shaoqiang, 2018).

The Spanish brand Correos has repositioned itself in a rebranding process from 2019 that includes the redesign of its visual identity and respective visual language system. In the same year, also Santander brand visual identity system seeks to respond to the growing number of online transactions and communications. The automobile industry is no exception, with brands such as VW, Peugeot and Harley-Davidson investing in visual language systems which seem intent to speak about different things or appealing to different audiences as to perform better in the digital environment.

In this sense, we defined the following research question: Is possible to identify and characterize the main limitations of the trademarks of brands, originated prior to or during the 20th century, which might jeopardise their recognition and coherence in websites and social media?

Thus, the study aims to observe the resilience, adaptability, and visual performance of Brand Marks in websites and social media.

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

We selected a systematic methodology with a non-interventionist research based on direct observation, and descriptive case study of large and international brands. This study focuses exclusively on brand marks.

To avoid a sectorial analysis and biasing the results due to sectorial codes, 30 brands were selected from the top brands in Best Global Brands 2022 (Interbrand, 2022) and the Global 500, 2022 (Brand Finance, 2022). From this process we selected Apple, Coca-Cola, Amazon, YouTube, Ferrari, Microsoft, Google, Samsung, Toyota, Mercedes-Benz, Disney, Nike, Shell, McDonalds, Tesla, Pinterest, Pepsi, Netflix, IBM, Louis Vuitton, Chanel, Hermés Paris, Sony, Audi, Zara, Master Card, Accenture, VW. Peugeot and Harley-Davidson, considering their respective rebranding processes, and MTV and City of Melbourne because they are two common examples on dynamic brand marks. On the other hand, our selection criteria intended as well to extract accurate data and the analysis on all typologies of the classification of brand marks, as proposed by (Raposo, Moreira da Silva et al., 2022).

The data was collected in a non-interventionist manner, through direct observation of information accessible to the public and from the perspective of what the stakeholders observe.

For us it is important to understand how a brand mark allows you to create a favicon with contrast and intelligibility, but also to compare the number of configurations defined in the brand identity style guide or brand center with the applications on social media and in the header of the website, seeing it's performance on responsive pages. We assume that a greater number of

configurations of a brand mark increases the likelihood of visual incoherence and recognisability.

After selecting the 32 brands, considered as case study, we observed in the respective brand identity style guide or brand centres, the number of brand mark configurations. Then, we collected evidence about the variant in use in the header of the website, in the favicon, in the avatars of the social media Facebook and Instagram, because all brands exist in these two media.

The data collected gave rise to a support table from which we analysed its anatomy and possible configurations (only a logotype; only a symbol; symbol and logotype as the main version; different configurations in the position between logotype and symbol; different configurations in the scale of logotype, symbol and designation; a secondary symbol for specific uses; use of colour), the contrast, the occupied spot, the clarity of the brand mark and its coherence in the various media.

Table 1. Sample of brand marks from biggest and most valuable international brands.

Brand	Business Year	Year of latest brand mark redesign	Brand Mark Anatomy (main version)				Brand Mark possible configurations (secondary versions)								Brand Mark Applications in Digital Media						
			Only Symbol	Only Logotype	Logotype and Symbol / Symbol and Logotype	Logotype with Symbol	Symbol with Logotype	Single Version	Only Symbol for specific uses	Only Logotype for specific uses	Isolated different symbol for specific uses	Second variant of symbol with logotype	Version for horizontal formats	Version for vertical formats	Responsive or short version	Variability	Website Header	Favicon	Avatar on Facebook	Avatar on Instagram	
Accenture	1989	2017				x												accenture			
Amazon	1994	2000				x												amazon			
Apple	1976	2017	x															apple			
Audi	1909	2016	x																		
Chanel	1883	1924	x															CHANEL			
City of Melbourne	—	2010				x															
Coca-Cola	1886	2009	x																		
Ferrari	1947	2002	x																		
Google	1998	2015	x															Google			
Harley-Davidson	1903	2019	x																		
Hermès Paris	1837	1942				x															
IBM	1911	1972	x															IBM			
Louis Vuitton	1854	2017	x															LOUIS VUITTON			
Master Card	1966	2016	x																		
McDonalds	1955	2006	x																		
Mercedes-Benz	1871	2007				x															
Microsoft	1975	2012				x												Microsoft			
MTV	1981	2021	x																		
Netflix	1997	2017	x															NETFLIX			
Nike	1971	1995	x																		
Pepsi	1898	2014				x															
Peugeot	1896	2021																			
Pinterest	2010	2016				x															
Samsung	1938	2005	x															SAMSUNG			
Shell	1907	1999	x																		
Sony	1946	1973	x															SONY			
Tesla	2003	2017				x															
Toyota	1937	2020																			
VW	1937	2019																			
Disney	1923	2011	x																		
Youtube	2005	2017				x															
Zara	1975	2019	x																		

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

Although they can be combined, we can understand that logotypes and symbols are two different alternatives to design a brand mark. Two different ways of solving a problem.

We observe that there is a tendency for brand marks to have several configurations. Among those with more than one configuration, there are cases of potential danger of visual incoherence, namely in the case of Peugeot. There are cases like Chanel and Louis Vuitton where the symbol is used as a reinforcement of the logo, working as a second identity element, although they may have more singularity.

Logotypes have limitations in reduction, both in terms of contrast and visibility, and in partial recognition. Logotypes tend to be very long and horizontal, which does not allow good performance in digital, especially when they are limited to a square or circular area in the favicon or avatar in social media. Take Coca-Cola, IBM, Samsung, Sony, and Zara. Symbols like Nike's present some contrast problems because of their slender shape and length. Something like what is observed in the symbol of the Coca-Cola bottle (5th element) for being slender and tall, which reduces its contrast in the favicon. In logos, the complexity of the font can compromise contrast, although Disney and Zara present good levels of coherence and contrast.

The Hermès, Samsung and Sony favicon are examples where the initial is used as a symbol. In these cases, the undifferentiated character of a typography (pre-existing lettering) does not allow the initial to have the character of a symbol, the uniqueness needed to stand out and be recognized. The same does not happen with Disney, where the calligraphic initial of the logotype is sufficiently distinctive to operate as a symbol. The case of Google presents a G symbol that operates as a formal and chromatic synthesis with a different design from the initial of the logo. The same happens with Netflix.

Monograms like Chanel's or Louis Vuitton's present good performance as a symbol, with less stylistic graphic coherence in the second case.

The symbols show higher graphic performance, in terms of contrast and coherence. Cases like Apple, Audi, Ferrari, Harley-Davidson, Mastercard, McDonalds, Nike, Shell, and Volkswagen. These have no change in the way they appear in the header of websites, even when responsive, in the favicon and avatars on social media. Even those with a more horizontal format like Audi and Mastercard, show good performance and consistency. Of these, most have a main version, although there are cases of second brand marks for specific cases that we do not detail here, namely Audi, Harley-Davidson, Mastercard and McDonalds.

Among the brand marks composed of logotype and symbol, Hermès stands out for not using the symbol as a favicon. However, the rule tends to be the opposite, giving importance to the symbol over the logo, as observed in Mercedes-Benz, Microsoft, Pepsi, Pinterest, Tesla, Toyota, and YouTube.

Brand marks using logotype with symbol tend to have an isolated symbol configuration, which seems to us to be a problem due to the low level of uniqueness of these symbols, as in the cases of Accenture and some cases of Amazon.

Second configurations of brand marks or shortened versions, are notably solutions to the favicon, such as at Amazon, City of Melbourne, Coca-Cola, Harley-Davidson, IBM, Netflix, and Peugeot. In some cases, the shortened version appears to have the potential to replace the main version or has already become the main version.

In the case of City of Melbourne, being a dynamic visual identity system, this highlights a limitation of these systems and the need for a stable or even monochrome version. The change in the favicon colour is observed in cases such as Apple, IBM, and MTV.

We assume the limits of this study, due to the selected methodologies and the representativeness of the sample in relation to the universe. However, the data should be taken as indicators to support decisions about brand mark design.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We acknowledge the financial support of CIAUD, Lisbon School of Architecture, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal and FCT – Foundation for Science and Technology.

REFERENCES

- Airey, D. (2019). *Identity Designed. The definitive Guide to Visual Branding*. Beverly: Rockport Publishers.
- Bokhua, G. (2022). *Principles of Logo Design*. Beverly: Quarto Publishing Group.
- Brand Finance (2022). *Global 500, 2022. The annual report on the world's most valuable and strongest brands*. Brand Finance.
- Carmi, E. (2020). *Branding Design Oriented*. Bologna: Fausto Lupetti Editore.
- Castro, I. L. (2021) "Logic's visual identity: Contribution to reputation management in the logistics outsourcing sector", *Convergences - Journal of Research and Arts Education*, 14(28), pp. 151–159. doi: 10.53681/c1514225187514391s.28.122.
- Chen, Y.-T., Cai, D., Huang, H.-F., & Kuo, J. (2003). An evaluation model for graphic design works. *Proceedings of Sixth Asian Design Conference* (pp. 14–17). Tsukuba.
- Costa, J. (2001). *Imagen Corporativa en el siglo XXI*. Buenos Aires: La Crujía Ediciones.
- Georgiev, G., Nagai, Y., Taura, T., & Morita, J. (2007). Coordinating meanings of logotypes for support of the design process. *ConnectED 2007 International Conference on Design Education (CD-ROM)* (p. 4). University of New South Wales.
- González Cuéllar, R. (. (2020). *Logotipo. Las características esenciales*.
- Interbrand (2007). *Glossário de Marcas: Inglês - Português*. Porto Alegre: Bookman.
- Interbrand (2022). *Best Global Brands 2022 Report. Brands as acts of leadership*. Interbrand.
- Johnson, M. (2019). *Branding in five and half steps*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Olins, W. (2008). *The Brand Handbook*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.
- Oliveira, F. (2018). "Brand's Identity and Visual Culture", in: Raposo, D. (Ed.) *Communicating Visually: The Graphic Design of the Brand*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp.117–138.
- Pereira, L., Martins, N., Ferreira, S. D., Neves, J., Silva, J., Brandão, D. (2023). *Iconography Design for Digital Applications Developed for the Elderly or Senior User*.

- In: Raposo, D., Neves, J., Silva, R., Correia Castilho, L., Dias, R. (eds) *Advances in Design, Music and Arts II. EIMAD 2022*. Springer Series in Design and Innovation, vol 25. Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-09659-4_8
- Raposo, D. (2008). *Design de identidade e imagem corporativa*. Castelo Branco: Edições IPCB.
- Raposo, D. (2012). *La letra como signo de identidad visual corporativa: codificación y descodificación visual del sistema de identidad*. Lisboa: Faculdade de Arquitetura. Universidade Técnica de Lisboa.
- Raposo, D. (2022). *Análise de Marcas Gráficas: Marcas portuguesas de produtos alimentares destinados à exportação*. Lisboa: Faculdade de Arquitetura. Universidade de Lisboa.
- Raposo, D., da Silva, F. M., Neves, J., Silva, J., Ribeiro, R., Correia, R. (2021). Brand Marks Analysis. Criteria and Evaluation Components to an Analysis Tool. In: Markopoulos, E., Goonetilleke, R. S., Ho, A. G., Luximon, Y. (eds) *Advances in Creativity, Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Communication of Design*. AHFE 2021. Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems, vol 276. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-80094-9_52
- Raposo, D., Laginha, C., Neves, J., Silva, J., da Silva, F. M. (2020). Methodology of Analysis of Brand Visual Identity of Food Products: Comprehension and Valuation of Graphic Signs. In: Rebelo, F., Soares, M. (eds) *Advances in Ergonomics in Design*. AHFE 2019. Advances in Intelligent Systems and Computing, vol 955. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20227-9_18
- Raposo, D., Moreira da Silva, F., Correia, R., Ribeiro, R., Neves, J., Silva, J. (2022). Brand Marks examination. Empirical study of graphic parts in their relation to contrast, recognition, and memorization. In: Francisco Rebelo (eds) *Ergonomics In Design*. AHFE (2022) International Conference. AHFE Open Access, vol 47. AHFE International, USA. <https://doi.org/10.54941/ahfe1001985>
- Raposo, D., Moreira da Silva, F., Neves, J. & Silva, J. (2018). Clarifying the Concept of Corporate Identity: From a Collective Vision to Cultural Interface. in: *Advances in Ergonomics in Design*. AHFE 2017. Advances in Intelligent Systems and Computing, vol 588. Cham: Springer, pp. 600–609. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-60582-1_60.
- Raposo, D., Neves, J. & Silva, J. (2017). “The Brand as the Interface Between Business and Stakeholders. Different Perspectives on Brand Architecture”. in: *Investigação e Ensino em Design e Música*. Castelo Branco: Edições IPCB, pp.105–114.
- Raposo, D., Neves, J., Silva, J. & Laginha, C. (2016). The Contribute of Graphic Style and Connotations to Memorability of Brand Marks from Agri-Food Sector. In: *Advances in Ergonomics in Design*. Advances in Intelligent Systems and Computing, vol 485. Cham: Springer, pp. 651–663. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-41983-1_59.
- Raposo, D., Oliveira, F. & Farinha, L. (2020). “From Identity Into Brand Visual Identity: Finding and Defining the Intangible Brand DNA”, in: *Handbook of Research on Driving Industrial Competitiveness With Innovative Design Principles*. Raposo, D. and Farinha, L. (Ed.), Pensilvânia: IGI Global, pp.66–85. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-3628-5.ch005>.
- Raposo, D., Ribeiro, R., Amaral, M., da Silva, F. M., Martín Sanromán, J. R. (2020). The Brand Mark Competitors Map as Visual Research Tool. Using Graphic and Symbolic Data in the Brand Visual Identity Project. In: Rebelo, F., Soares, M. (eds) *Advances in Ergonomics in Design*. AHFE 2019. Advances in Intelligent

- Systems and Computing, vol 955. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20227-9_9
- Rijo, C. (2022). Mapping of Graphic-Semantic Representations in Design Teaching. In: Raposo, D., Neves, J., Silva, J. (eds) Perspectives on Design II. Springer Series in Design and Innovation, vol 16. Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-79879-6_19
- Shaoqiang, W. (2018). Responsive Logos. Designing for the Digital World. Barcelona: Promopress.
- Sher, P. (2021). Branding and the Visual Response. How a Brand turns into visual identity. Budaörs: Brand Guide Universe.
- Shumate, A. M., 2021. Logo Design Theory. How Branding Design Really Works. Cardigan: Elfstone Press.
- Slade-Brooking, C., 2016. Creating a brand identity: A guide for designers. London: Laurence King Publishing.
- Suárez-Carballo, F., Galindo-Rubio, F. y Martín-Sanromán, J. R. (2018): “La simplicidad en el diseño de marcas gráficas: análisis de la preferência”, *Arte, Individuo y Sociedad*, 30(2), pp.275–293. doi: <https://doi.org/10.5209/ARIS.56791>.
- White, A. W. (2017). The Elements of Logo Design. Allworth Press.