




# Competitor Map for Analysis of Brand Marks and Logo Design. Determining the Common Characteristics of Competing Logos to a Better Positioning and Differentiation of Brand Marks

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**Abstract.** This paper is a case report, presenting a method to dissect brand marks (logotypes and/or symbols) and Visual Identity Systems to inform the logo design process.

The proposed method of competitors' map allows to scrutinize features and to identify existing common characteristics among sets of competing brand marks, improving decision making during the design phase, namely, the better paths to ensure graphic and semantic positioning and differentiation.

This proposal of competitors' map of brand marks and Visual Identity results from a research process conducted through a mixed methodology, comprising non-interventionist components, such as literature review, dissection of existing methods and direct observation, followed by exploratory active research grounded on project design.

Regarding results, we present a methodology and techniques to dissect brand marks and Visual Identity Systems, including strategies for analysing visual data and drawing conclusions about common denominators. This proposal of competitors' map of brand marks was validated by professionals in professional projects and with students in academic work.

**Keywords:** Competitor map · analysis of brand mark · analysis of logotypes · analysis of logos · analysis of symbols · brand mark and logo design process

## 1 Introduction

This article is a case report resulting from a post-doctoral research project in Design, entitled “Analysis of Brand Marks: Portuguese brands of food products intended for export” [1], in which the competitor map methodology is proposed and deepened to systematize, dissect, and analyse brand marks and Visual Identity signs. The research process deals

with the semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic analysis of the infrasigns of brand marks (logotypes and/or symbols) and their relationship with brand image. The competitor map methodology allows to characterize graphically the competitor's Visual Identity in each market and to identify possible graphic codes, serving designers in design decisions in terms of differentiation and brand positioning. This research is of interest for assessing the differentiation capacity of a brand or for characterizing markets, particularly in Go-to-Market strategies in current/new markets. This proposal of competitors' map of brand marks and Visual Identity is intended for use in design education and professional contexts.

Visual Identity plays an essential role in characterising, identifying, and differentiating places, entities, organisations, objects, and brands.

The ability given by Visual Identity to identify and distinguish requires prior knowledge and memorisation, but it is an important asset in an increasingly digital, international, and highly competitive world.

The first impression of stakeholders and recipients tends to be formed by sight, based on the style, content and language of the Visual Identity, whose graphic characteristics must be sufficiently relevant in graphic-semantic terms for them to be memorised.

On the other hand, as a language system, Visual Identity establishes the visual correlation between various components and gives coherence to the products where it is applied, integrating them as part of the brand—branding them. In the context of branding and contemporary branding, this act of branding organisations, products or services includes criteria on what should be branded and how. On the other hand, it includes both the impression of the brand mark and the product concept, its intrinsic characteristics and visual properties that make it distinctive and give it a position, degree of kinship and similarity, both in the range and in the brand portfolio.

Visual Identity design refers to the selection and design of graphic components and their organisation into a system for identifying and differentiating a brand in each market or context.

Authors such as Slade-Brooking (2016), Johnson (2019), Carmi (2020), Cameira (2020), Brea (2020), Sher (2021) and Wheeler (2024) present proposals for methodological models of visual brand identity, agreeing on the structural need to inform the Visual Identity on the context, consensually proposing a research stage in their respective methodologies. Something similar has been done in previous works, namely Raposo (2012) and which have contributed to consolidating the proposal we are explaining today in this article. Under the auspices of the visual audit, the visual study of the competition, the identification of sector codes or the detection of trends or graphic common features (Raposo, 2018), the above-mentioned authors point to the importance of analysing graphic data. Professionals and academics often collect brand marks and other elements of the Visual Identity System to inform the design project.

Although collecting brand marks and Visual Identity systems is a frequent practice in the research phase of a Visual Identity project, there are few clues or established knowledge about the parameters of analysis. The analysis is empirical and tends to be superficial or generic, which can result in a waste of time and resources and fail to fulfil the purpose of the research. There is therefore a problem about how to use, analyse and interpret graphic data derived from research on existing Visual Identity systems, or

on brand marks. Existing proposals in the field of semiotics tend to focus essentially on imagery and art, making them less useful and appropriate for analysing the graphic signs of Visual Identity. In this way, designers and students seem to be left with preconceived value judgements created from a poorly researched perception of the whole, which is potentially not very faithful to reality.

It was in this context that the following research question was formulated: Is it possible to define a method and techniques to dissect brand marks to detect common features and sectorial graphic codes?

To this end, we formulated the following research objectives: To scrutinize graphic components and to identify existing common characteristics among sets of competing brand marks or sectorial graphic codes. Improve the decision making during the design phase, namely, to ensure graphic and semantic positioning and differentiation, in Go-to-Market strategies.

The hypothesis was formulated: Dissecting brand marks allows to observe how the sub-components operate, to systematize the analysis to make it less subjective, allowing to establish connections and to identify relevant graphic features, graphic patterns or existing codes in a market or business activity sector.

A mixed methodology was used to test the hypothesis. The literature review provided a theoretical framework and analyzed scientific studies of interest to this study. On the other hand, dissection of existing methods and direct observation of their implementation was carried out, leading to a proposal for a Brand Mark Competitors Map. This proposal was realized as an active research component about and project design based with students and with the collaboration of a communication designer.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

What we named as Brand Mark Competitors Map is a Visual Research Tool for systematising and analysing graphic data on Visual Identity Systems.

Other concepts have been used, such as Competitive Landscape or even Competitive Audit, although these techniques tend to be less detailed and less systematised than the one proposed here.

The term Competitive Landscape refers to the business method of studying and understanding the business context, identifying, and analysing direct or indirect competitors, namely their mission, vision, core values, market niches, strengths, and weaknesses (Betts & Hitt, 1995; Duch-Brown, 2017). However, Budelmann, Yang & Wozniak (2010) consider that the Competitive Landscape can be used to define the style of the Visual Identity, positioning it in relation to competitors.

Wheeler (2024) refers to the term Competitive Audit, while Slade-Brooking (2016) uses the terms Market Sector Analysis and Competitor Brand Analysis. However, both authors agree that it is a way of analysing competing brands, their brand personality (identity, archetypes, and language), their brand mark, typography, text and tone of voice/style, slogans, key messages, but also their advertisements, media, and websites. The Competitor brand analysis presented by Slade-Brooking (2016) is essentially a styleboard, organised by product groups.

Research has been carried out to identify and understand connotations, the aesthetic and graphic functional and perceptual requirements of brand marks, as well as which properties make them more memorable, with the aim of supporting designers in the design of brand marks.

These studies include the proposal for guidelines to support the design and selection of brand marks by Henderson & Cote (1998), which presents 13 essential graphic requirements present in a sample of 195 foreign brands and evaluated in different sets by designers, design students and book authors.

Childers & Jass (2002) divided their study into two parts. In the first, the parameters of analysis were identified with a group of 22 students who evaluated and selected product categories, benefits, adjectives and identified brand names in the car and clothing sectors; and a second group of 19 students who selected images of cars and trousers. After selecting the parameters for analysis, the second part began, also subdivided into two stages. The first group had a sample of 96 higher education students, evaluating advertisements in a leaflet, associating the product with connotations on opposite scales, while the second group evaluated according to the principles of Kevin Lane Keller in 1993.

Henderson, Giese & Cote's (2004) proposal resulted from a study organized in four phases: Phase 1—A group of five designers identified the distinctive graphic characteristics of typography, generating 24 pairs of antonymous concepts; Phase 2—82 designers classified 210 typographies (10 to 12 each), on a 7-level scale of semantic differential for each of the 24 pairs; Phase 3—Impressions considered strategic in the results of other studies were defined and 35 designers established the correspondence between 210 typographies and these attributes; Phase 4—A presentation was created with the brand marks of the same size, randomly visualized by 336 students and evaluated on the basis of the 24 pairs of antonymous concepts.

Ramón Martín San Román (2005) validated a method on semantic differentiation that allowing to identify graphic connotations of plastic signs, usable as elements of Visual Identity, namely in the masthead and front page of Spanish newspapers.

The proposal of Doyle and Bottomley (2006) aimed to identify connotations in brand marks, cross-referencing them with the positioning of the brand or product. They used Osgood, Percy, and Tannenbaum's Semantic Differential (1976) to evaluate brand marks considering the market. In a first study, they counted 142 respondents to assess the antecedents of 132 letters (arbitrary, figurative, and abstract associations) and the fit between the product and the letter of the brand marks. A further 120 products were evaluated based on the same principles, seeking to establish a relationship between letters and product range. The second study evaluated aspects of preference and the influence of the name. A leaflet was created to simulate the yellow pages with simulated adverts and the respondent was asked to select 4 companies that they would hire.

Similarly, this author's study, in Raposo (2012) pointed out that brand marks are conventionalized and intersubjective signs, with a strong dependence on the culture and context of use, such as the brand's market. Our research was based on 15 case studies of major brands, the authors of the design were interviewed, the competitive context of the brand was analysed and two rounds of questionnaires were carried out with people who know the brands and with people who don't know them, with the aim of studying

the typographic connotations in text, in brand marks and in the Visual Identity system, and putting forward some parameters for typographic selection, with a view to effective brand communication.

Adapted from the C-HIP communication model and the semiotic triad (object, sign, interpretant), the “Triad of Meaning Creation during the Communication Process” is subdivided into the Semantic, Syntactic and Pragmatic dimensions, which correspond, in the same order, to Brand Identity, Brand Visual Identity and Brand Image (Raposo, Neves, Silva and Laginha, 2016). According to this proposal, the selection and codification of brand marks falls under syntactics, i.e. the design options, the visible form of the symbols and their expression or the graphic style capable of triggering connotations, attention, and guiding recognition. Syntactics combines the various elements of visual communication according to the brand’s programmed, in terms of composition, shape, colour, imagery and typography (Raposo, 2018).

Considering the results of these studies, brand marks should be studied considering the social agreement on its meaning, as graphic sign (graphic-semantic relationship), from a semiotic and social perspective, their performance to identify, differentiate and visually correlate in different moments and communication media.

However, we note that the studies carried out show how certain graphic features connote certain meanings but fail to define design principles. On the other hand, several authors have empirically listed the quality requirements and design principles of brand marks, among others are Chaves and Belluccia (2003), González Cuéllar (2020) and Shumate (2021).

Chaves and Belluccia (2003) proposed quality indicators to assess brand marks, which rely heavily on the judgement of the designer and their professional and personal experience and culture: Generic graphic quality (Is the graphic quality of the symbol relevant to the graphic culture of the public?); Typological fit (Are the symbols selected/(re)designed relevant and sufficient?); Stylistic correctness (Are the rhetorical resources and style of representation appropriate?); Semantic compatibility (Are the design choices compatible or incompatible with the main concepts to be represented?); Versatility (Is the Graphic Brand flexible and compatible with the various discourses or tones of communication?); Validity (Is the visual language limited to a time or place/culture or does it have a universal tone?); Reproducibility (Can the graphic identity be reproduced and used in different media?); Legibility (What is the degree of visual recognition in terms of contrast?); Intelligibility (Is the meaning easily understood?); Good Form (“Prägnanz”—Is the Graphic Brand simple and has the capacity to be remembered?); Empathy (Does it have the capacity to attract attention and interest?); Uniqueness (What is the degree of visual recognition in terms of differentiation?); Declination (What kind of systemic structure or brand declination exists?).

According to González Cuéllar (2020), the essential characteristics of brand marks are the concept (semantic link to the brand), flexibility (adaptation to the brand’s communication needs), originality (ability to differentiate and register as a brand), longevity (not designed according to fashions), durability (possibility of use for more than five years), adaptability (possibility of use in different sizes and formats), legibility (ease of identification and memorization), identification (compatibility with public expectations), representativeness (compatibility with the company’s values) and aesthetics (graphic and

connotative reinforcement of the meaning). On the other hand, for Shumate (2021), the design principles of a brand mark are related to the need to identify and differentiate the brand without unnecessary artifice; the possibility of using it in monochrome while maintaining the shape of the colour version; a true positive (inverse to the automatic positive); that it has a uniform mass or contrasting shape to the background and in various formats; formal and stylistic coherence between sub-components; contrast without overlapping components; defined shapes with optical alignments; the privilege of simplicity with an emphasis on components and without details.

Shumate (2021) also indicates the following typologies and techniques for brand mark design: Symbols that function as a Container, mainly to provide unity, include elements and ensure contrast (e.g. Heinz, Gap, Oral-B; Ford, IKEA; Container-Form, which reinforces and combines graphic components, creating meaning, unity and contrast (e.g. Puma, Johnnie Walker, LG, ML, Star-bucks). Planetary or Silhouette, the use of an object's profile in the form of a background (e.g. Puma, Johnnie Walker, Danone Nutricia); Fragmentation, subdivision into components to create differentiation; Exclusive coincidence, reinforcement of the name or meaning (Ex. City Direct; Studio Eight); Linear treatment, simplification for lines (Airbnb, VW, Toyota); Ligatures, motifs and flourishes (Ex: Exxon, Smoothies, Coca-Cola); Negative forms use of positive-negative forms (Ex: USA, Babelfish, elefont); Essence, simplification and visual emphasis (Ex: Apple, Mastercard, Rockport Publishers); System of Shapes, when the symbol or logo is made up of several symbols (Ex: Unilever, Heartbrand, Texaco); Lettering in emblem (Ex: Pringles, Metallica, Halls).

Something relatively ignored in these studies has been the Vienna Classification (VCL), although essential in trademark registration for classifying and textually describing the graphic elements of brand marks, the result of the Vienna Agreement in 1973 (EUIPO, 2020). As a hierarchical system, organized from the general to specifics, the Vienna Classification presents each section of the figurative elements in categories, divisions, and sections (varying in number), subdivided into main and auxiliary sections, each with a special coding number (EUIPO, 2020).

Regarding the design style, degree of iconicity or abstraction of brand marks, not many developments have been made. Abraham Moles' iconicity scale in 1976 was designed for images, as was the iconic expressiveness matrix by Joan Costa in 1989 (Costa, 2008), supplemented by Villafaña (2006), neither of which is suitable for symbols nor brand marks. It was to fill this gap that Laginha, Raposo, & Neves (2016) proposed an iconicity scale, proposing a scale of seven levels, from iconic to arbitrary abstraction.

### **3 A Roadmap on the Analysis of Proposals to Examine Brand Marks and Visual Identity Systems Seeking the Definition of the Competitor's Map Method**

When looking for forms of maps of competitors and ways of characterizing the brand marks of a given market, one of the first studies we found was by d'A Valls (1980 and 1981) and concerned international banking entities. It collected 611 brand marks from the main banks in 80 countries, quantified in the following categories: iconic, realistic, figurative, abstract, linguistic, acronym, initial, iconic-linguistic. The semantic

relationship between some concepts is difficult to delimit, with subjective selection, and some brand marks can be included in more than one category, with results that timidly aid design decision-making.

The analysis process created by designer and professor Francisco Calles and adopted at the Maestría en Diseño Tipográfico, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, makes use of the quality indicators proposed by Chaves and Belluccia (2003), adding parameters that we consider to be more relevant due to their objective nature and possible use in subsequent decision-making. The adoption of an analysis form helps to systematise, although the parameters are still very subjective.

In 2005, American sociologist James I. Bowie defended his doctoral thesis on patterns, graphic similarities, and trends in registered trademarks in the United States of America, creating a tool for analysing patterns in registered trademarks, which gave rise to *Emblemetric*, founded in 2012 (Bowie, 2012).

Focussed on brand marks for Portuguese municipalities, Ribeiro's work (2009) analyses each graphic component separately: Colour, symbol, logo, composition, although without detailing each part.

The visual research methodology used in 2011 by Moving Brands in the HP rebranding project pointed to the relevance of the "Visual Brand Audit" and the "Competitor Audit", as well as identifying other parameters for evaluating a sector of activity and aspirational brands.

Coelho (2013), went further and deeper into exploring the graphic form of brand marks, using the drawing criteria explained by Dondis (1974), Bertin (1983), Arnheim (1988), Elam (2001) and Aires (2006) to define categories of analysis. The proposal is exploratory and applied, allowing for a good dissection of small sets of brand marks, but not very suitable for analyzing large numbers.

Analysing brand marks using diagrams is also explored empirically by designers Nicholl and Leonard (2014). They begin by identifying a market, which they subdivide into ranges, from which they draw up a panel of graphic brands, followed by identity elements such as colours, textures, typefaces, names, typographic genres, symbol typology, etc. However, the analysis is carried out using diagrams that allow them to observe the market or the ranges, the configuration of which depends on the analysis parameters defined.

Oliveira (2015) studied the advantages of using diagrams to analyse and design brand identity and visual language systems, proposing the diagram to decompose elements into a visual landscape that can be vertically compared with others. This systematisation process showed us the importance of considering brand marks within the Visual Identity System, along with colour, imagery, typography, and other components of the language system.

Proposed in 2019 by Rijo (2020), the graphic-semantic expressions map is somewhat complementary to competitor maps in that it also aims to direct and systematise research into brand marks and the analysis of graphic components. The first column of this proposal coincides with the purpose of the competitor map, as it includes a sample of competing brand marks and the drawing of conclusions about the most used or common typography, colours and shapes. This methodology is design-orientated and aims to go

into little detail about the study of competitors. However, it was essential to understand how to triangulate the dissected parts and draw conclusions.

The relationship between Rhetoric and Graphic Design has been established and studied by several researchers, most notably Gérard Blanchard (1979), Leire Fernández (2007), Roberto Gamonal (2011) and Eduard Helmann and Brian Switzer (2017). We have taken Helmann and Switzer (2017) proposal as a reference because, unlike others, it only deals with brand marks and brand names, fitting this study only to characterise symbols and logotypes. According to Helmann and Switzer (2017), graphic metaphors are organised as follows: Convention—Forms of Circumscription; Schema – Forms of Addition; Schema—Forms of Transposition; and Schema—Forms of Omission.

## 4 The Brand Mark Competitors Map

This proposal of Brand Mark Competitors Map was originated in 2002 as a way of guiding students through a visual brand identity design project, recognizing the difficulties they had in making sense of the graphic material collected during the research phase.

The Brand Mark Competitors Map has had various configurations, including a horizontal diagram, a horizontal tree chart and, above all, as tables, varying according to the needs of the project and the commitment of the students.

More consolidated versions can be seen in the end-of-course projects in communication design at [Communication Design and Audiovisual at IPCB].

One such example was the study of Laginha's (2018), which was already formally enrolled in the research of [Raposo (2012)], representing an advance in the definition of a structure for analysing brand marks based on semantics, syntactics and pragmatics. This proposal was based on work carried out by Ribeiro (2009), Coelho (2013) and above all on the analysis grids put into practice by this researcher, in design teaching context since 2002.

The 2019 version of the Brand Mark Competitors Map already included the Viena classification and, was designed as a form that could to be used printed or digitally. This version made it possible to establish the correlation between the brand mark and the brand, namely the structure and nature of the business, the brand architecture, the name and detailed the analysis of the graphic elements of the brand mark—what is represented and how—in the symbol, logo, colours, design typology, level of iconicity, etc. (Raposo, et al., 2019, Raposo, et al., 2020, Magalhães and Oliveira, 2023).

As well as implementing the method in the classroom, it was used in research and knowledge transfer projects, as well as by designers who recognized the value of the method. This has made it possible to consolidate the parameters, their presentation and a deeper understanding of the design principles and ways of identifying the components that should be part of the Brand Competitor Map (Raposo, et al., 2021).

Following on from the lessons learned, the data shows the importance of systemisation and clarity of specific concepts for a rigorous analysis. In this case, the study focuses on the typographic, symbolic, and chromatic dimensions, considering the other variables (Raposo, et al., 2021).

In the same vein, we analysed the classification systems or taxonomies of brand marks, ending up with a proposal that subdivides the brand mark into a logo and symbols, alone or in combination, and establishes subcategories (Raposo, et al., 2021).

#### 4.1 Evaluation and Proposal of the Brand Mark Competitors Map

As described, the analysis process involved continuous experimentation which involved the selection of analysis parameters, their visualization, and their application.

In the classroom context, the method was applied in the first academic semester over twenty years, with more than 700 undergraduate students in communication design and more than 100 master's students in graphic design at the Polytechnic University of Castelo Branco. Examples of this are the final projects by students such as Susana Lopes for the Beira Baixa Cheese Producers Association (2002), Oscar Andrade and Sérgio Tremoço with the Corporate Visual Identity for Hospital Amato Lusitano (2006), Sónia Alexandre for the company Click Criativo (2013). At master's level, end-of-course projects by students such as Vanessa Simões for the NERCAB/AERCAB business association (2014), André Pacheco for the Spryou brand, and Laginha's (2018) on olive oil brands from beira baixa, among many others.

Between 2002 and 2010, the versions of Brand Mark Competitors were defined on a case-by-case basis, without basic parameters, sometimes centered on the brand mark and sometimes on Visual Identity and brand communication.

As a matter of systematization, from 2011 onwards the model focused on dissecting the brand mark to assess the relevance of the parts to determine style.

The test was to gauge the intelligibility of the parameters to guide the collection of graphic data and analyse it, but also the practicality of implementing it in quantity.

The model was implemented and developed as part of development and transfer projects, which included characterising sectors and niches in the food market with a view to designing brand marks and Visual Identity Systems for the products or companies involved in the projects. Two projects in particular stand out, namely "REINOVA Reindustrialização, empreendedorismo e inovação nos setores produtivos tradicionais" (0448\_REINOVA\_6\_P) e "Operação Promoção e Valorização de Azeites de Montanha" para Transferência do Conhecimento Científico e Tecnológico (CENTRO010246FEDER000004/ 6756), respectively with researchers and graphic designers Rogério Ribeiro and Mariana Amaral.

In the first case, the Brand Mark Competitors Map was used to characterize the food market in Portugal, Spain, China, some PALOP countries and three South American countries. In the case of the second project, it was used to characterize the Portuguese olive oil market.

A very considerable level of depth was achieved in 2020, with a ten-page form to be applied to each brand, just to dissect brand marks. The length of the form and, above all, the students' difficulty in dealing with complex concepts (design, semiotics, branding, and rhetoric) required the inclusion of visually illustrated instructions. On the other hand, while the form made it possible to deepen the analysis to a very high level, it generated a proportionally large amount of information that was difficult to process. Above all, it broke the logic of a Visual Identity System and disrupted the overall vision of a market or market niche.

In a business context, the Brand Mark Competitors Map was adopted by designer Ricardo Correia from 2019, having been used in projects such as the brand's Visual Identity Azeites Candeio.

The last proposal was consolidated in 2022, maintaining its focus on dissecting brand marks, but also including the main manifestations of the Visual Identity System under study. On the other hand, it facilitates a general or detailed reading of each brand mark, as well as the set collected from the market. This last version has been tested that same year and in 2023 and 2024 with a total of 195 undergraduate students in communication design and 36 master students in graphic design at the Polytechnic University of Castelo Branco.

Organised in groups of two to promote discussion, students are given a Brand Mark Competitors Map template to fill in and analyse based on at least 30 competing brand marks. The students have found it easy to understand and implement, and there has been an increase in the quality of the conclusions and the way they inform design decision-making. This version has also been adopted by the designer Ricardo Correia.

The Brand Mark Competitors Map is organised in vertical columns, one for each brand mark, leaving the last one for conclusions. The horizontal rows fall into two groups. The first group is semantics (the intended and attributed meaning to the sign), starting by identifying what is represented by the brand mark, referring to symbols as a broad, semiotic concept, and the function given to the selected symbol.

The second corresponds to the syntactic level (the way the sign was designed, its graphic subcomponents and how it shapes a coherent unit, the overall shape, contrast, expression and graphic style capable of triggering connotations, attention and generating perception/recognition), which is divided into several sections, namely the anatomy of the brand mark, its composition, and predominant colours, followed by the typographic form, the symbol, the colour, the packaging, and the imagery.

The typographic form aims to identify the class used in the logo, considering the Vox-ATypI classification, then the upper- or lower-case variant, which connotes different sensations and is more precise than something generic like sans serif or serif. The width and posture are also observed.

In terms of the symbol, we look at the drawing style, whether it is organic or geometric, the scale of iconicity or level of abstraction, its semiotic classification, and the Vienna classification. In terms of design, we also look at whether the design is contour or fill and whether it suggests or represents volume.

In the case illustrated here, we show packaging, which can be changed to the most representative support for brands in a different market. Here we want to show how the style of the product adds to the concept of Visual Identity, a sensation to which shapes, colours, materials, textures, and colours as a main contribute.

Imagery is an essential feature of the Visual Identity System and brand communication, which can be seen in the various advertisements over time and in various media, as well as in the content created by the brand for social networks.

In each row, a concluding summary should be drawn up in the last column, above all to emphasise what happens most often or always. This makes it possible to make a reading by row or a reading, which results in a detailed idea of the sector of activity.

This doesn't mean that design choices must follow the trend, not least because the opportunity sometimes lies in contrasting sharply in some areas and harmonising in others. Nor does it generate any kind of prescription that limits the designer's options, as it is above all a way of systematically analysing what exists.



The pragmatics of brand marks (recognition and understanding by third parties) is not studied in the proposal we are making here, as it requires other more appropriate techniques such as a questionnaire survey (Fig. 1).

Although the Brand Mark Competitors Map proposal has been consolidated, there is still work to be done on reflection and continuous improvement, as well as other application perspectives, both via diagrams and digital media. How can this method be updated to evaluate visual efficacy of Brand Marks on websites and social media platforms (Raposo, et al., 2022, Raposo, et al., 2023). On the other hand, it seeks to advance the design principles of brand marks and digital proposals to evaluate them (Vieira, et al., 2023).

## 5 Conclusion

The study of brand marks requires a multifaceted analysis, incorporating graphic, aesthetic, perceptual and symbolic dimensions, contextualised both culturally and commercially. It is crucial to realise that brand marks do not communicate but mean something and that this meaning must be coherent with the brand. The expansion of the media, especially digital media, demands greater flexibility from brand brands. Large brands, for their part, may choose to valorise brand language systems to the detriment of very striking graphic expressions. Non-interventionist research methodologies and empirical analysis allow for the triangulation of diverse data, enriching the understanding of brand marks.

The correlation between design of brand marks, coding, communication, decoding, culture, the market, and branding was highlighted, emphasising the strategic importance of brand marks for business competitiveness and innovation.

The application of the scale of iconicity or abstraction of brand marks fills the gap in the analysis of levels of brand schematisation and design style, when combined with a survey of the predominant shapes, colour combinations and types of design.

The competitor map has emerged as an essential tool for the comparative and strategic analysis of brand marks, although its use still requires familiarity with key concepts.

By adopting the Brand Mark Competitors Map, students and design professionals immerse themselves in a meticulous exploration of the brand Visual Identity landscape in each market or segment. This approach not only makes it easier to identify common graphic patterns, such as graphic style, recurring symbology's, predominant colours, imagery, and brand typography, but also allows for a deeper understanding of the nuances and trends that shape the visual landscape.

We can appreciate that the competitor map is a method and techniques for dissecting brand marks and visual brand identity systems, allowing to observe how the graphic sub-components operate and how they are correlated as a graphic sign. It was a way to deepen knowledge of how brand marks work in each sector and to see how it's possible to identify relevant graphic features or existing codes in a market. By providing partial and total conclusions, the competitor map offers several levels of reading, reduces the subjectivity of the analysis, and helps to designers make decisions on Visual Identity design projects.

By highlighting the graphic elements characterising the competition, the "Brand Mark Competitors Map not only provides valuable insights to evaluate, design or

redesign a brand Visual Identity, but also opens the door to detecting emerging trends. This methodology is not limited to deciphering the present in a brand market; it sheds light on possible future directions, enabling brands to adapt and innovate in a more agile and effective way to ensure graphic differentiation.

In this era where visual language plays a crucial role in communicating and differentiating brands, the Brand Mark Competitors Map stands out as an indispensable tool, enabling organisations to navigate the constantly evolving competitive landscape with confidence and vision.

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