



ANALYSIS OF THE MOST VALUABLE GRAPHIC BRANDS

A Comparison of Leading Global Corporations and Elite Professional Football Clubs

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Visual identity Graphic brands Branding Attention economy Brand communication Corporate brands Football clubs	<i>In the context of the attention economy, corporate visual identity has become a key strategic asset for brand differentiation. This study aims to compare the graphic brands of the world's most valuable corporations and professional football clubs. To this end, a systematic quantitative content analysis is conducted on a sample of 120 brands, based on plastic, iconic and linguistic variables. The results reveal two distinct visual models: a corporate model characterised by simplification and standardisation, and a football model defined by greater symbolic complexity. The study concludes that these two models reflect different strategic and cultural logics within contemporary branding.</i>

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1. Introduction

Within the current context of the attention economy (Guld, 2023), the brand has become established as one of organisations' most valuable strategic assets, surpassing even the importance of traditional tangible assets (Brujó, 2014; Mayorga-Escalada, 2024). In environments characterised by communicative saturation, symbolic hypercompetition and market convergence, a brand's ability to be recognised, remembered and differentiated becomes a key factor in generating economic, reputational and relational value (Kapferer, 2012). In this context, corporate visual identity emerges as a fundamental strategic device for articulating and visually projecting brand identity in environments characterised by intense competition for attention (Aaker, 2023).

Corporate visual identity can be defined as an organised system of graphic signs that enables an organisation to be identified, differentiated and visually represented to its stakeholders (Costa, 2014; González-Solas, 2004; Villafañe, 2002). This system integrates plastic, iconic and linguistic elements that operate in an interrelated manner to translate corporate identity into visual form (Chaves, 2016; Oliveira & Raposo, 2016). From this perspective, visual identity is not merely an aesthetic exercise, but a structural component of strategic branding, as it contributes to the construction of meanings, associations and values that shape perceptions of the brand among its audiences (Contreras & San Nicolás, 2001).

Within this system, the graphic brand occupies a central position, functioning as a visual synthesis of corporate identity (Olins, 2009). Beyond its identifying function, it constitutes a semiotic artefact capable of articulating recognition, differentiation and symbolic promise within a relatively stable visual unit (Foroudi et al., 2017; Vieira, 2023). Various studies have shown that the graphic brand not only facilitates identification, but also contributes to generating familiarity, trust and emotional bonds with audiences (Salvador-Rivero & Montes-Vozmediano, 2016).

Figure 1. Definition and basic examples of graphic brand types.



Source: Begoromero.com, based on (Chaves & Espinosa, 2022).

From a cognitive perspective, graphic brand design acquires particular relevance in contexts characterised by rapid, fragmented and repeated exposure, such as digital environments and social media platforms (Henderson et al., 2004; Zhao & Meyer, 2007). In these settings, the effectiveness of the visual sign depends on its capacity to be processed quickly and easily, which has driven the progressive simplification of dominant graphic languages (Gregersen & Johansen,

2022; Slade-Brooking, 2016). Recent literature shows that simple, geometric, two-dimensional graphic brands with restrained colour palettes tend to generate more positive evaluations, greater recognition and better brand recall, particularly in contexts of low involvement or visual saturation (Suárez-Carballo et al., 2018).

This trend is directly linked to the attention economy (Melo, 2022), understood as an environment in which human attention becomes a scarce and highly contested resource (Wang, 2024). In this context, brands compete not only for market share, but also for visibility and exposure time within a fragmented media ecosystem dominated by digital interfaces (Díaz-Mesa, 2025). Visual identity, and the graphic brand in particular, thus acts as a strategic instrument for capturing and optimising audience attention, functioning as a cognitive shortcut that facilitates the rapid identification of an organisation within saturated visual flows (Bernal-Torres, 2025).

Nevertheless, the consensus surrounding simplification as a means of achieving visual effectiveness is not without debate. While some authors interpret it as a functional adaptation to platform environments and the accelerated circulation of images, others warn that it may lead to visual homogenisation and a loss of symbolic distinctiveness (Chaves, 2016; Gregersen & Johansen, 2022). In this sense, simplification may improve legibility, but it may also reduce the narrative density of the sign when it entails excessive neutralisation of its historical or cultural references.

The digitalisation of communication has intensified these dynamics by multiplying the points of contact between brands and users, requiring visual identities that are highly adaptable across multiple media, sizes and formats (Sanz-Peralta et al., 2023). Websites, mobile applications and social media have become central spaces for the construction and projection of brand identity, in which visual coherence, legibility and flexibility have become fundamental principles of contemporary design (Wheeler & Meyerson, 2024).

This debate is directly related to studies of communication and visual culture in digital environments (Freedman, 2025; Thellefsen & Friedman, 2023). The graphic brand no longer circulates solely as a stable corporate sign, but as an image subject to constant recoding across screens, social media, mobile interfaces and contexts of accelerated visual consumption (Raposo et al., 2023). Within this framework, visual identity forms part of a broader digital visual culture in which visibility, repetition, simplification and recognition intersect with processes of standardisation and competition for attention (Denga et al., 2023).

Accordingly, the attention economy involves not only quantitative competition for visibility, but also a qualitative regime that favours visual configurations that can be processed rapidly and are scalable, legible and adaptable. The simplification of the graphic brand can therefore be interpreted as a strategic response to contemporary conditions of visual circulation (Bernal-Torres, 2025; Díaz-Mesa, 2025; Melo, 2022). However, this logic does not manifest itself uniformly across all brand domains.

Alongside global corporate brands, which are oriented towards international markets and characterised by substantial strategic investment in branding, there are other brands of considerable economic and symbolic value that operate according to different communication logics. Particularly prominent among these are elite professional football clubs, whose brands are firmly embedded in the entertainment industry and the show business of professional sport (Boyle & Haynes, 2014; Ginesta, 2017).

Professional football constitutes one of the foremost contemporary global spectacles, attracting audiences in the millions, generating substantial revenues and maintaining a strong media and digital presence (Getnet et al., 2025; Giulianotti & Armstrong, 2013). In this context, clubs function simultaneously as sporting organisations, entertainment companies and cultural brands deeply rooted in territories and collective identities (Chadwick, 2022; Niemann et al., 2024). This threefold nature shapes their visual identities, which must combine commercial functions with the articulation of historical values, symbols of belonging and identity narratives (Gómez-Bantel, 2016).

The expansion of social media and the mediatization of football have intensified the tension between tradition and digital adaptation in clubs' visual identities (Jägerskiöld-Nilsson, 2023; Macías-Carrillo, 2016). While clubs must preserve recognisable identity elements for their

established communities, they also need to adapt their brands to digital environments governed by the attention economy, where simplicity, legibility and visual versatility are essential (Suárez-Carballo et al., 2018). This tension is reflected in recent redesigns of crests and graphic brands, which have generated intense debate among supporters, designers and brand managers (Michailidis, 2016; Oleas et al., 2024).

Despite the strategic relevance of these issues, the academic literature on corporate visual identity has tended to analyse corporate and sports brands separately, without comparing their graphic languages through systematic studies based on large samples (Suárez-Carballo, 2022). Most studies focus on individual case analyses or qualitative examinations of rebranding processes, thereby limiting the identification of dominant visual patterns and structural divergences between different brand domains (Sanz-Peralta et al., 2023).

Within this context, a comparative analysis of the graphic brands of the world's most valuable corporations and the clubs representing the elite of international football offers a particularly relevant avenue for understanding the visual models that coexist within the contemporary attention economy. From this perspective, the study of the graphic brand transcends its formal dimension, providing a privileged means of accessing the cultural, symbolic and strategic logics that structure branding in highly visible global corporate and sporting contexts.

2. Objectives

As noted above, this study is situated within research on corporate visual identity and graphic brand design in the context of the attention economy and the mediatization of contemporary branding. It takes as its starting point an understanding of the graphic brand as a strategic device for the symbolic translation of brand identity.

(GO). The general objective is to compare the visual models (graphic brands) currently adopted by the world's most valuable corporate brands and football clubs.

In order to establish a sufficiently robust empirical basis for addressing the general objective, a series of specific objectives are proposed:

(SO1). To examine the predominant types and formal characteristics of the graphic brands of the world's most valuable corporate organisations and football clubs.

(SO2). To analyse the degree of iconic simplification or complexity of the graphic brands examined.

(SO3). To assess the use of colour and colour strategies in the graphic brands of the world's most valuable corporate organisations and football clubs.

(SO4). To analyse the role of the linguistic sign in the configuration of the graphic brands of the world's most valuable corporate organisations and football clubs.

These objectives make it possible to examine the configuration of graphic brands in both contexts systematically and comparatively, facilitating an integrated interpretation of the results and laying the foundations for a critical discussion of the evolution of visual branding within the attention economy and in professional football as a global entertainment phenomenon.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative, descriptive and comparative methodological design based on systematic content analysis (Bardin, 2002; Liauw, 2022). This technique is well suited to the analysis of complex visual objects such as graphic brands, as it enables the visual sign to be broken down objectively into observable, classifiable and comparable units (Allen & Simmons, 2003; Dopico-Castro et al., 2023; Foroudi et al., 2017). It also facilitates the identification of visual patterns, formal trends and symbolic strategies across large samples (Eytam et al., 2020; Gamonal-Arroyo & García-García, 2015; Jang et al., 2018).

From an epistemological perspective, the study is situated within the fields of visual communication and strategic branding, treating the graphic brand as a complex semiotic system

whose configuration is shaped by functional, technological, cultural and historical factors (Chaves, 2016; Costa, 2014; Olins, 2009).

3.2. Sample and Scope of the Study

The object of study comprises the official graphic brands of the 100 most valuable brands worldwide included in the *Best Global Brands 2024* ranking (Interbrand), together with those of the 20 most valuable professional football clubs listed in the *Football Money League 2024* (Deloitte). The total sample comprises 120 cases, representing 100% of the population under study. These rankings were selected on the basis of their international recognition and the methodological robustness of their valuation criteria.

The unit of analysis is the official graphic brand used by each organisation at the time of the study. The visual material was collected between October and November 2025. The organisations were initially identified through the two rankings, after which their graphic brands were verified on the respective official digital platforms to ensure the validity of the dataset.

3.3. Analysis Instrument

For data collection, an *ad hoc* analysis framework was developed based on the *Logo Design Analysis Protocol* (LDAP) proposed by Badajoz-Dávila et al. (2025), supplemented by contributions from Chaves and Espinosa (2022), Mollerup (1999) and Romero-Rodríguez et al. (2023). To align the instrument with the study objectives, the framework was structured around three analytical dimensions, drawing on the tradition of image analysis developed by Groupe µ (1993) and Joly (1999): the plastic sign, referring to the formal visual properties of the image; the iconic sign; and the linguistic sign.

Table 1. Content analysis framework for graphic brands

Dimensions of analysis	Variables	Coding categories
Plastic sign	Type of graphic brand	Logo only; logo with symbol; logo-symbol; symbol only; logo with background; logo with accessory
	Dimensional representation	Two-dimensional; three-dimensional
	Predominant shapes	Geometric; organic; mixed
	Proportions of the graphic brand	Horizontal; vertical; square/circular; irregular
	Compositional balance and stability	Symmetry; asymmetry; instability
	Use and shape of the container	No container; circular; square/rectangular; triangular or irregular
	Heraldic features	Presence of a heraldic container; use of internal divisions within the shield; presence of external ornamentation
	Number of colours	Two; three or more
	Colours	(colours)
	Colour harmony	Achromatic; monochromatic; analogous; complementary; other

Iconic sign	Number of relevant iconic elements	One; two; three or more
	Level of iconicity	Typographic; figurative; abstract
	Nature of the elements	Corporate; cultural/social/historical; political/territorial; sporting; other
Linguistic sign	Presence of a linguistic sign	Yes; no
	Type of name used	Corporate; popular; acronym
	Presence of year of foundation	Yes; no
	Typeface family	<i>Serif; sans serif; script</i>
	Typeface weight	<i>Light; regular; bold</i>
	Typeface slant	<i>Rounded; Italic/oblique</i>
	Typeface width	<i>Condensed; regular; extended</i>
	Letter case	High; low
	Text position (horizontal and vertical axis)	Centred; not centred

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on (Badajoz-Dávila et al., 2025); (Chaves, 2015); (Chaves & Espinosa, 2022); (García, 2018); (Gavira-Tomás, 2021); (Mollerup, 1999); (Oleas et al., 2024); (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2023)

3.4. Coding Procedure and Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted in several stages. First, the graphic material relating to the selected brands was collected and systematically organised using the rankings and official corporate sources. Second, each case was coded using the analysis instrument, with the values corresponding to each variable recorded. To ensure the reliability of the process, all variables and categories were operationally defined in accordance with methodological recommendations for visual content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf, 2017). The instrument was also reviewed beforehand to ensure internal consistency and avoid overlap between categories. Data recording was carried out through a blind paired-coding process (Lillo, 2012) involving two researchers. The procedure included independent coding, comparison of results, discussion of discrepancies and recoding of cases where necessary until consensus was reached. Finally, the data were cleaned, organised and analysed using SPSS statistical software, enabling the calculation of frequencies and percentages, as well as the identification of visual patterns and general trends across the sample.

4. Results

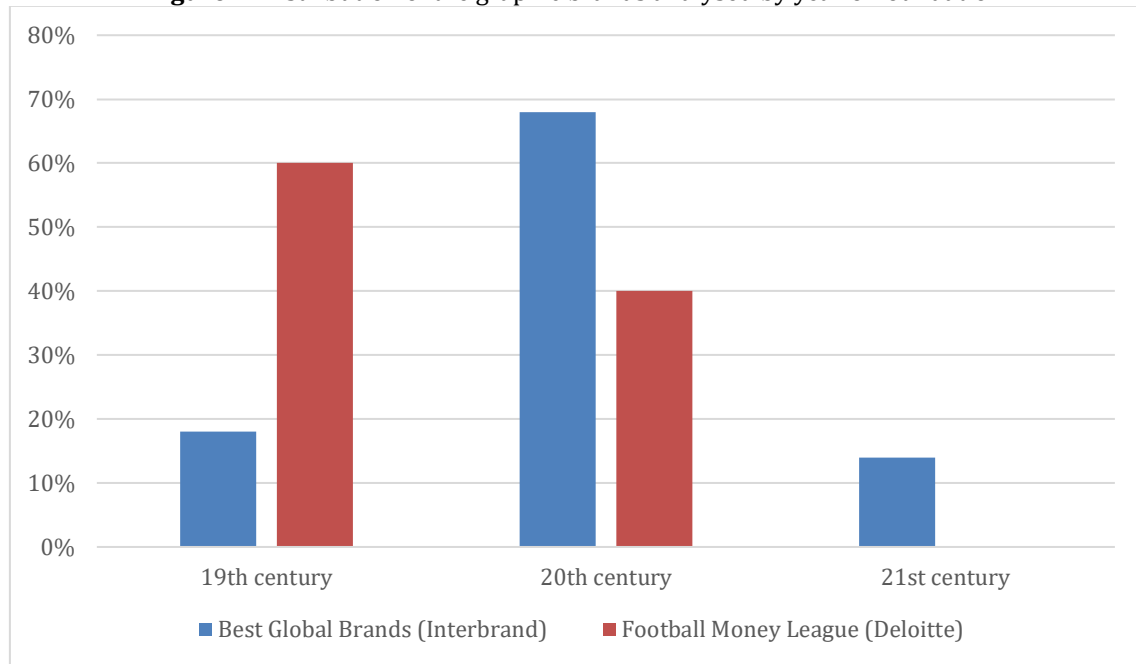
The study population comprises the 100 most valuable global brands included in Interbrand's *Best Global Brands 2024* ranking (83.3%) and the 20 most valuable professional football clubs included in Deloitte's *Football Money League 2024* (16.7%).

The global brands display considerable sectoral heterogeneity according to the Spanish National Classification of Economic Activities (CNAE). The technology sector accounts for the largest share (24%), followed by the consumer, fashion and aesthetics sectors (16% each), and the automotive and financial sectors (10% each). Entertainment and distribution are less strongly represented (8% each), followed by insurance (2%) and toys (1%).

Among the most valuable football clubs, there is a clear concentration across European leagues. The Premier League (England) accounts for 45% of the clubs, followed by La Liga (Spain), Serie A (Italy) and Ligue 1 (France), with 15% each, while the Bundesliga (Germany) accounts for 10%.

With regard to year of foundation, the 120 brands as a whole show a concentration of organisations established before the mid-twentieth century (58.3%), compared with 41.7% founded subsequently. Nevertheless, differences emerge between the two groups. Among the *Best Global Brands*, 52% were founded before 1950 and 48% thereafter. The historical character of the football clubs is much more pronounced: 90% were founded before 1950 (60% in the late nineteenth century and 30% in the first decades of the twentieth century), while only 10% were founded later.

Figure 2. Distribution of the graphic brands analysed by year of foundation.

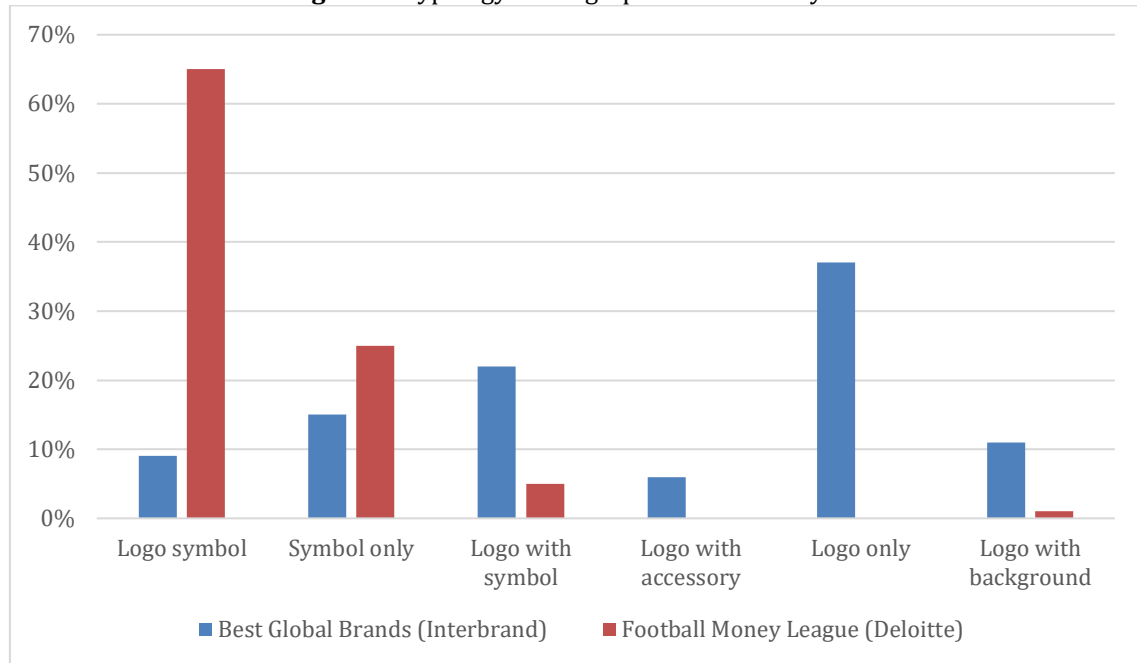


Source: Authors' own elaboration.

4.1. Plastic Sign

Across the sample as a whole, the pure logotype is the most frequent type (30.8%), followed by the logotype with symbol (19.2%), the logo-symbol (18.3%) and the standalone symbol (16.7%). Graphic brands with a background (10%) and those with accessories (5%) are less common. However, the comparative analysis reveals clearly differentiated patterns. Among the *Best Global Brands*, the pure logotype clearly predominates (37%), followed by the logotype with symbol (22%) and the standalone symbol (15%), while the logo-symbol accounts for only 12%. By contrast, among the clubs included in the *Football Money League*, the logo-symbol (65%) and standalone symbol (25%) clearly predominant, while the pure logotype is entirely absent.

Figure 3. Typology of the graphic brands analysed.

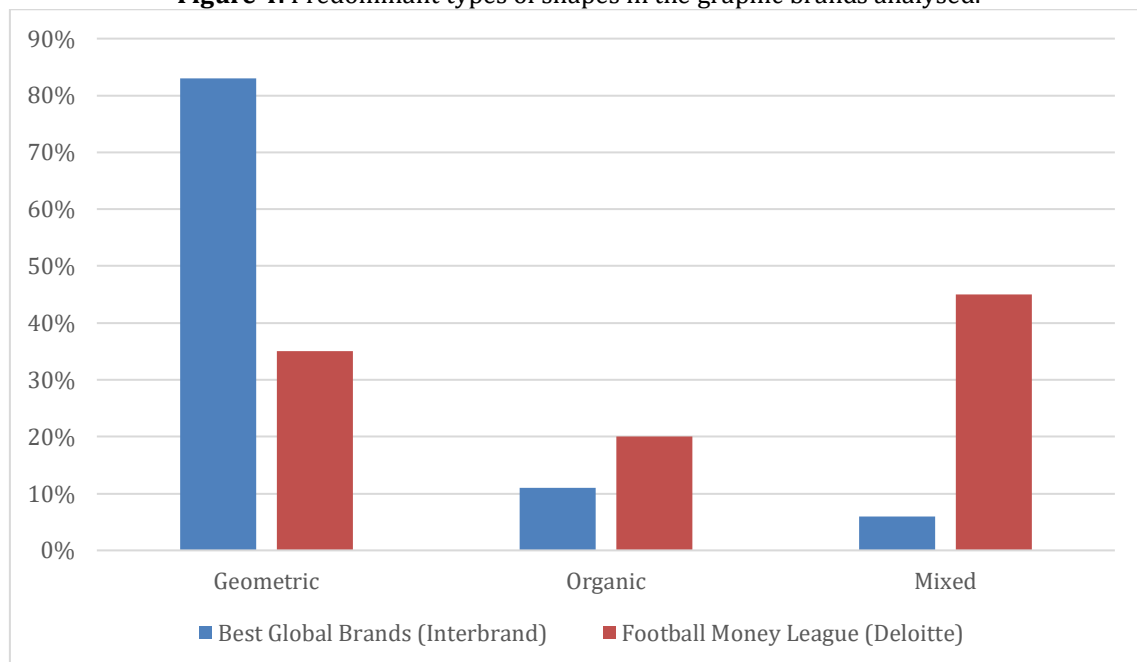


Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Two-dimensionality is an almost universal feature of the brands analysed (96.7%). This pattern is even more pronounced among the *Best Global Brands* (99%), whereas three-dimensional solutions remain present in 15% of football club brands.

With regard to predominant forms, geometric forms predominate across the sample as a whole (75%), compared with organic and mixed forms (12.5% each). This pattern is even more pronounced among the global brands (83%), while football clubs display greater formal diversity, with mixed forms predominating (45%), followed by geometric (35%) and organic forms (20%).

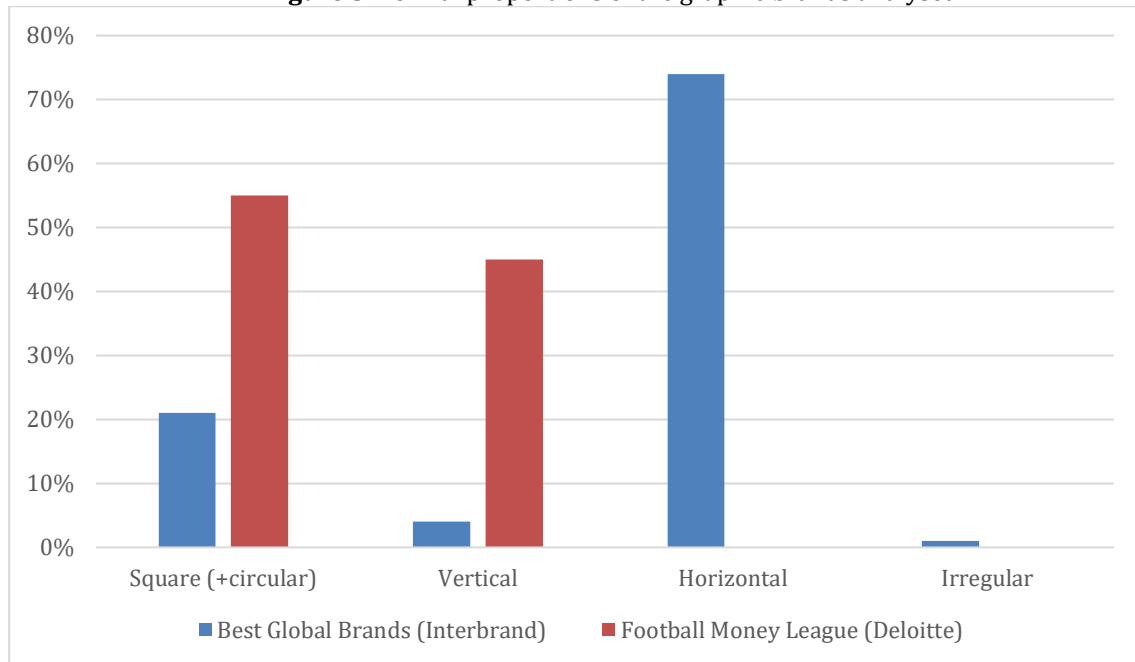
Figure 4. Predominant types of shapes in the graphic brands analysed.



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Horizontal proportions predominate across the sample as a whole (61.7%), particularly among the *Best Global Brands* (74%). By contrast, football clubs predominantly display square or circular proportions (55%) and vertical proportions (45%), with no horizontal proportions.

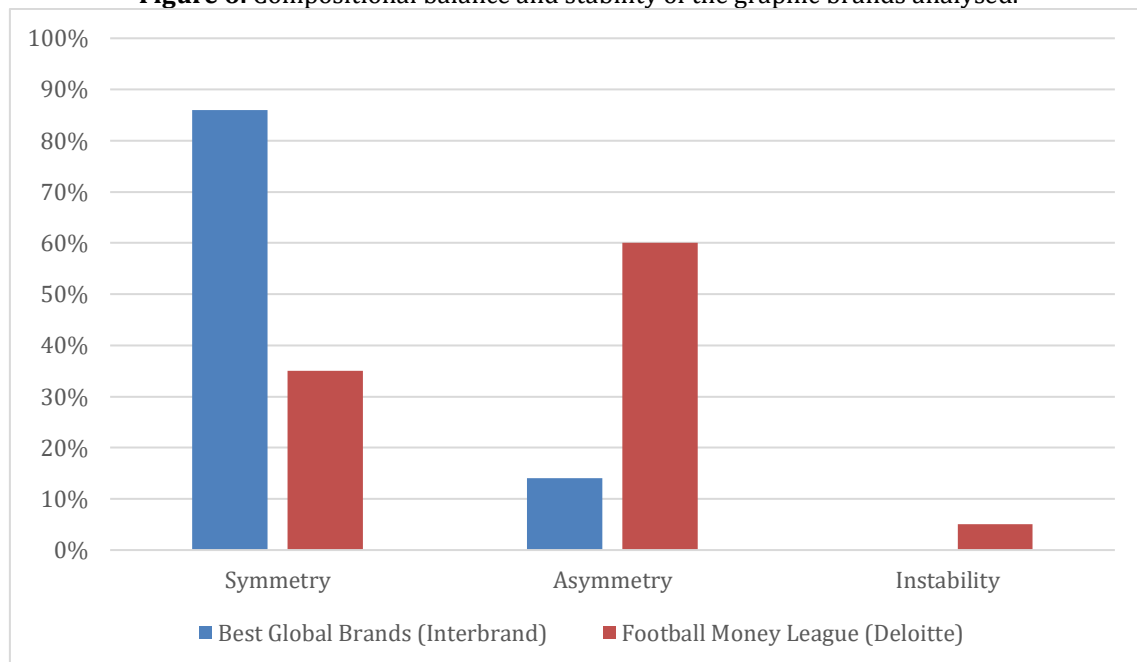
Figure 5. Formal proportions of the graphic brands analysed.



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

In terms of compositional balance, 77.5% of the brands feature symmetrical compositions, a proportion that rises to 86% among the global brands. Among football clubs, the pattern is reversed: asymmetrical compositions predominate (60%), compared with symmetrical compositions (35%).

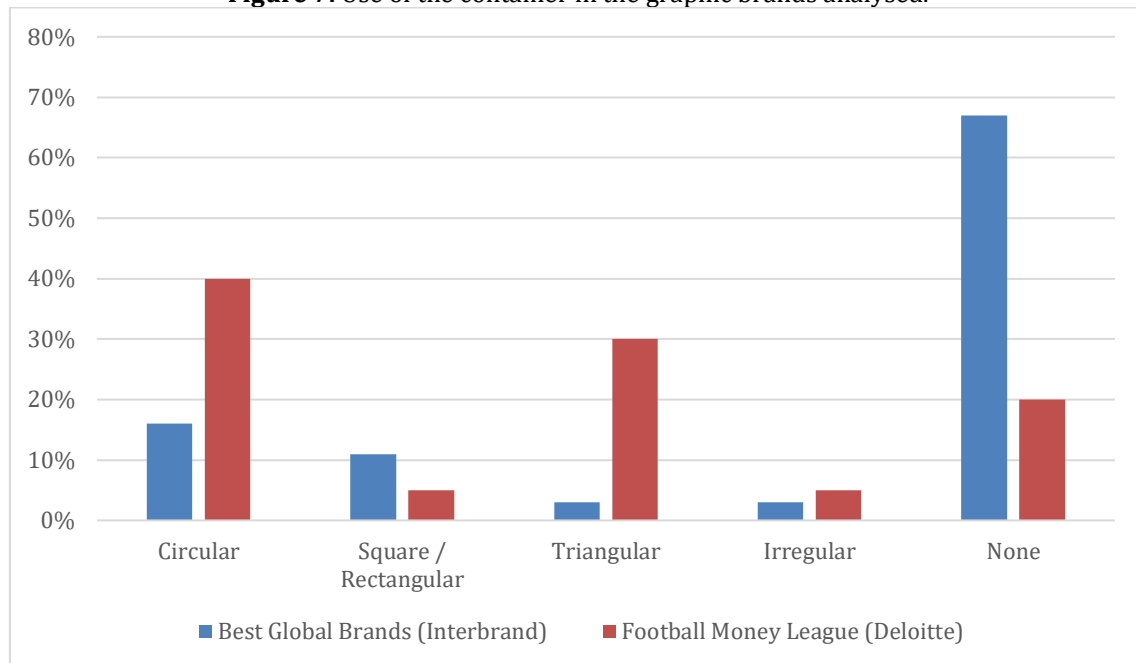
Figure 6. Compositional balance and stability of the graphic brands analysed.



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

A container is used in 40.8% of the graphic brands analysed, although the two groups display contrasting patterns. While 67% of the *Best Global Brands* do not use a container, 80% of the clubs included in the *Football Money League* incorporate one. In both groups, the circular container is the most common (16% and 40%, respectively). Among the global brands, the second most frequent option is a square or rectangular container (11%), whereas football clubs primarily use triangular containers (30%).

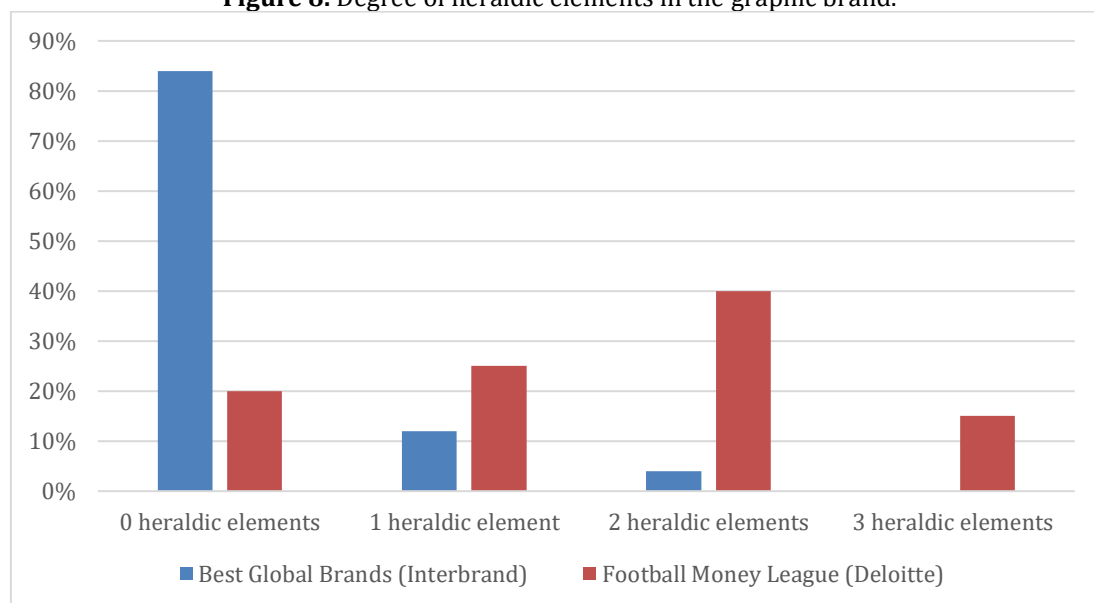
Figure 7. Use of the container in the graphic brands analysed.



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Heraldic features are present in 26.7% of the brands analysed, although there are marked differences between the two groups. Only 16% of the global brands incorporate heraldic elements, compared with 80% of football clubs. Among the latter, heraldic-style containers (80%), internal shield divisions (50%) and external ornaments (20%) are common, whereas these features are only marginally present among global brands.

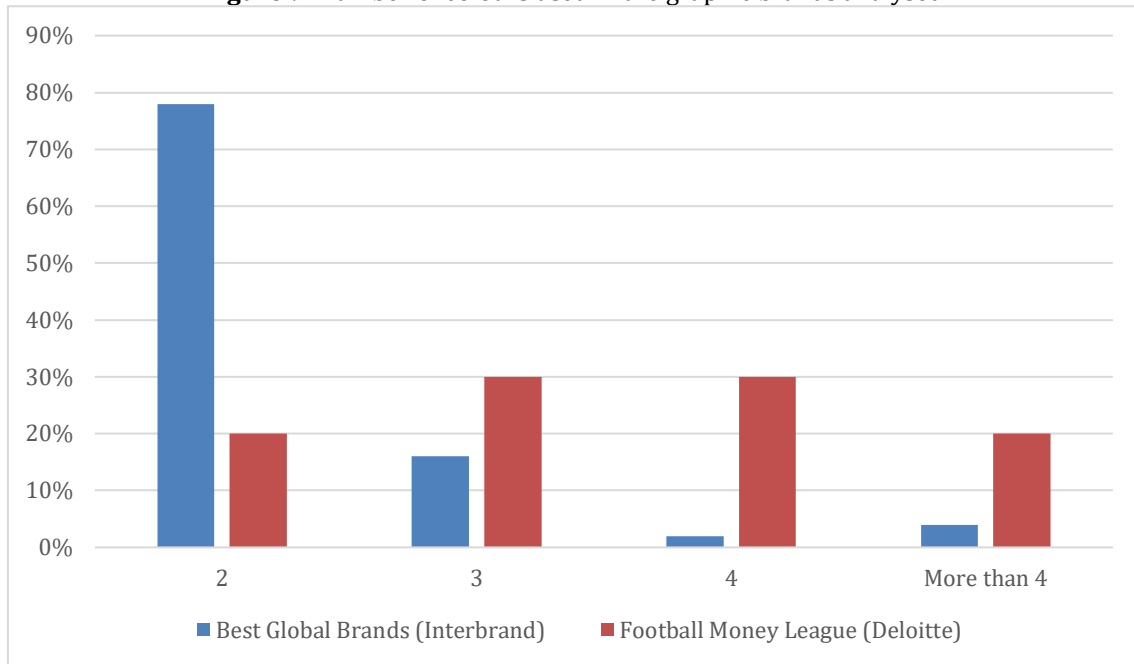
Figure 8. Degree of heraldic elements in the graphic brand.



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

With regard to colour, 68.3% of the brands use two colours. This tendency is even more pronounced among the *Best Global Brands* (78%), whereas the pattern is reversed among football clubs, 80% of which use three or more colours.

Figure 9. Number of colours used in the graphic brands analysed.



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

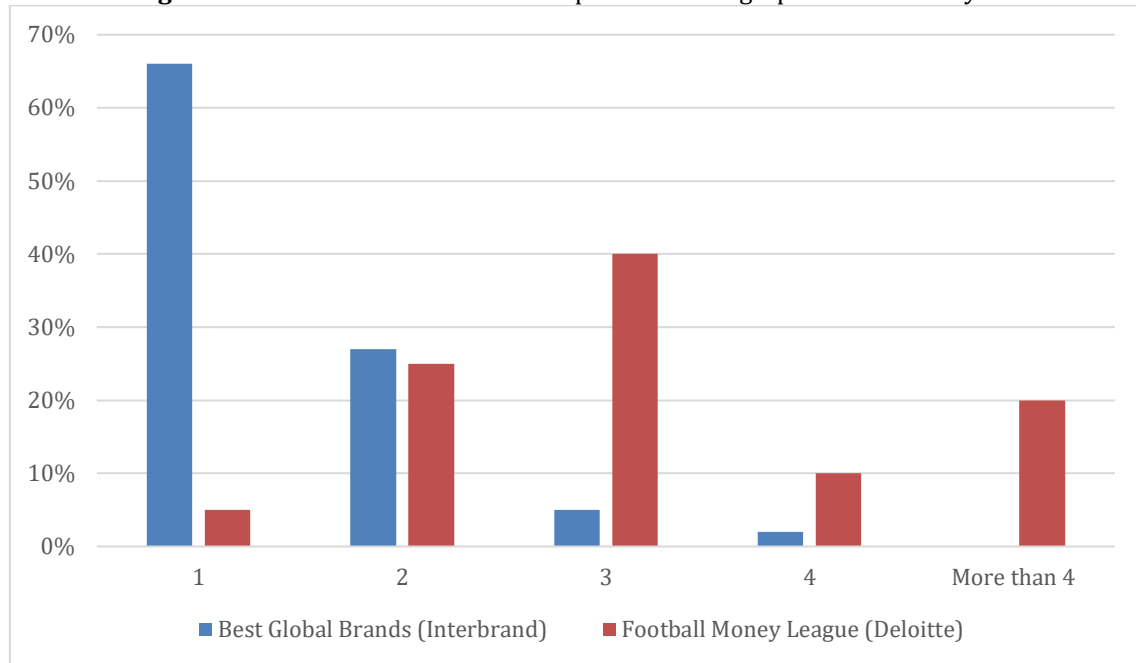
Regarding the colours used, white (75.8%), black (40%), blue (33.3%) and red (28.3%) predominate. A similar pattern is observed among the global brands, whereas blue and red are particularly prominent among football clubs (55% each). Other colours, such as green, yellow, purple and orange, are less common, with none exceeding 10%.

The most frequent colour harmonies across the sample as a whole are monochromatic (41.7%) and achromatic (25%). Among the global brands, these approaches account for 76%, whereas complementary harmonies and more complex colour combinations predominate among football clubs (60%).

4.2. Iconic Sign

Regarding the number of iconic elements, 55.8% of the brands incorporate a single element, 26.7% include two, and 17.4% include three or more. Among the *Best Global Brands*, a single element clearly predominates (66%), whereas 95% of the clubs included in the *Football Money League* incorporate two or more elements, indicating greater symbolic density.

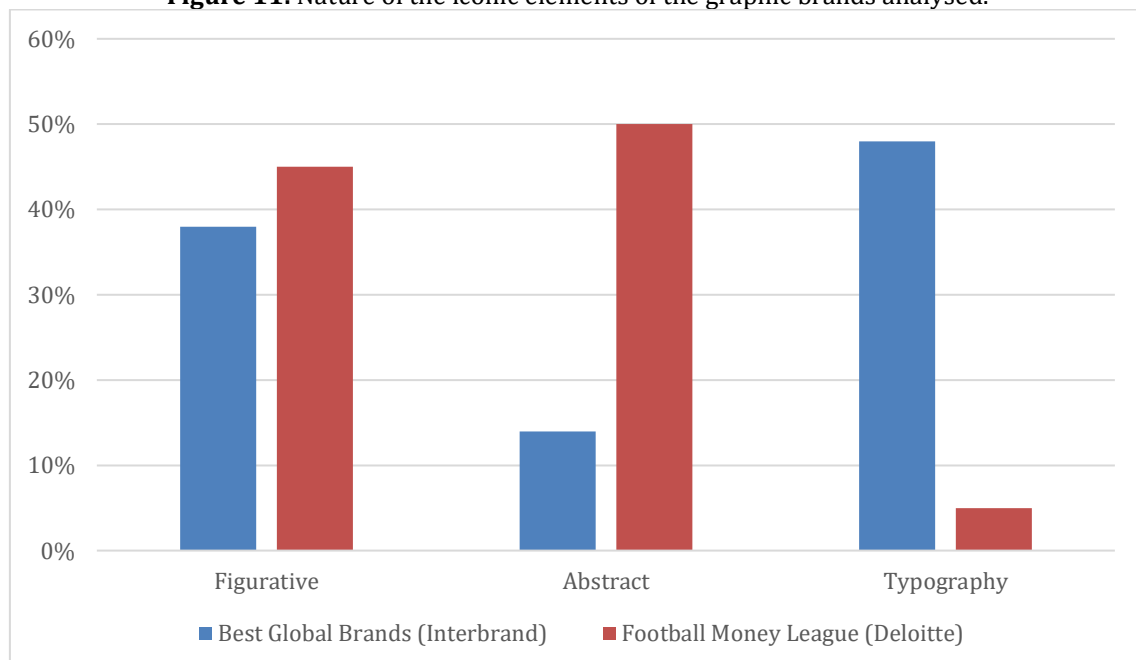
Figure 10. Number of iconic elements present in the graphic brands analysed.



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Regarding the level of iconicity, typographic brands predominate across the sample as a whole (40.8%), followed by figurative (39.2%) and abstract brands (20%). Among the *Best Global Brands*, typographic brands predominate (48%), whereas abstract brands are most prevalent in the *Football Money League* (50%), followed by figurative brands (45%), with typographic brands accounting for only 5%.

Figure 11. Nature of the iconic elements of the graphic brands analysed.



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Regarding the nature of the iconic elements, corporate references are present in 96.6% of cases. These are followed by cultural, social or historical elements (27.5%), political or territorial elements (6.6%), sporting elements (5.8%) and other elements (0.8%). Football clubs display

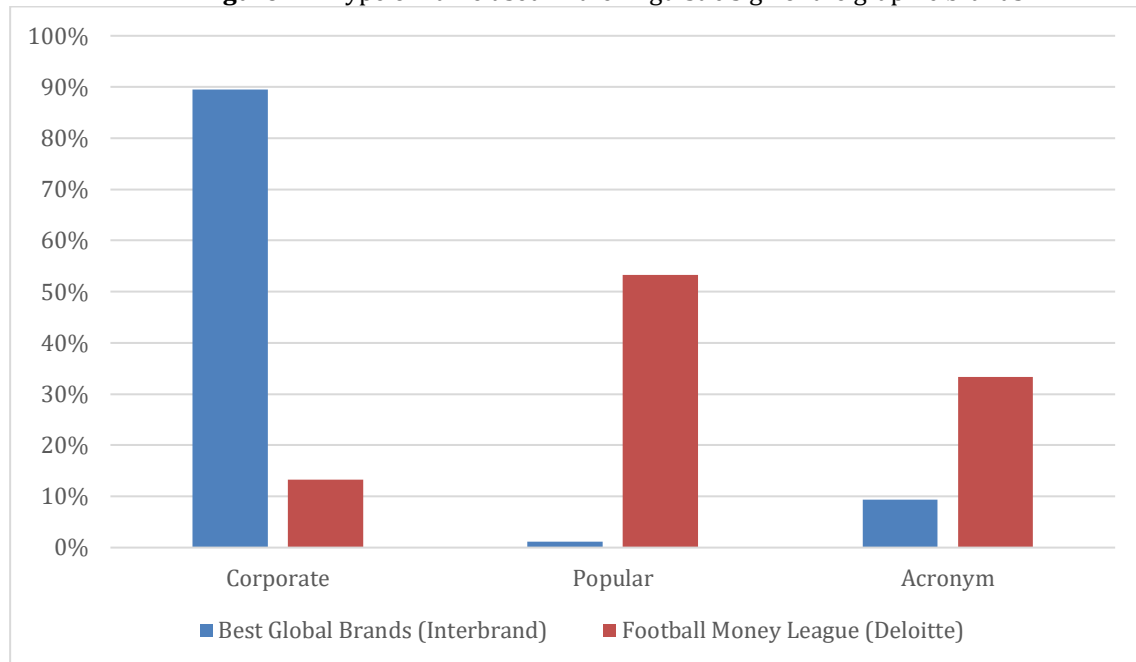
greater symbolic diversity, with a significant presence of cultural or historical elements (65%), sporting elements (30%) and territorial elements (25%).

4.3. Linguistic Sign

The linguistic sign is present in 84.2% of the graphic brands analysed, with a higher incidence among global brands (86%) than among football clubs (75%).

Among the brands that incorporate text, the corporate name predominates (78.2%), followed by acronyms (12.9%) and popular names (12.9%). Among the *Best Global Brands*, the corporate name is dominant (89.5%), whereas among the *Football Money League* clubs, popular names (53.3%) and acronyms (33.3%) predominate.

Figure 12. Type of name used in the linguistic sign of the graphic brands.



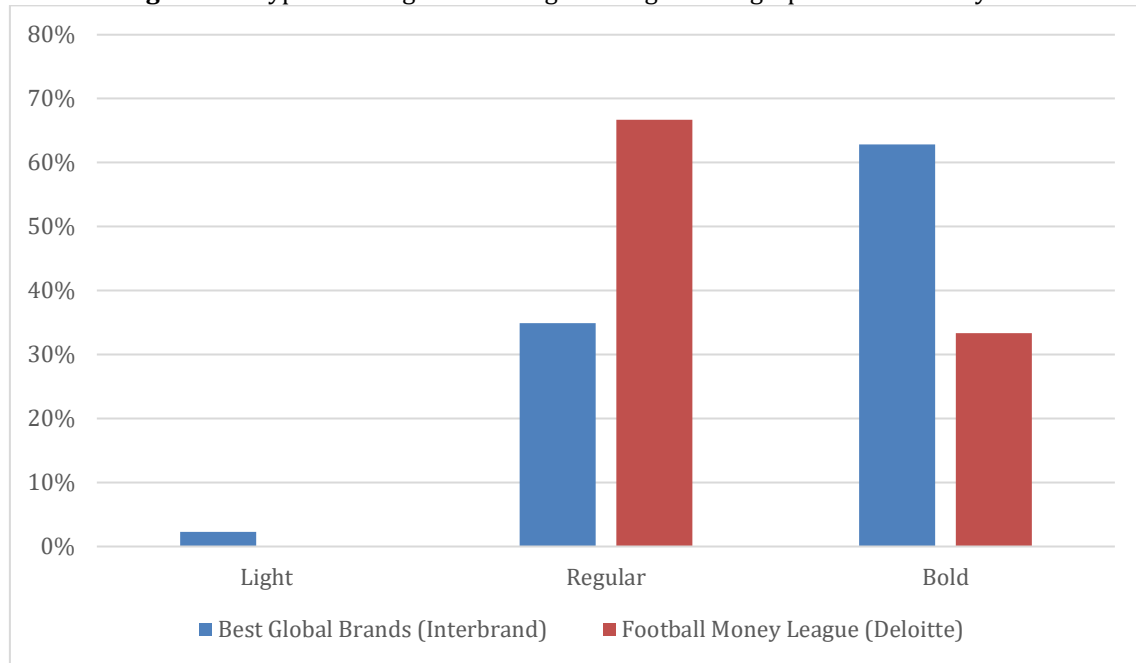
Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The year of foundation appears only infrequently (4%). Among global brands, its presence is marginal (1.2%), whereas among football clubs it reaches 20%.

Regarding typeface family, sans serif typefaces predominate (67.3%), followed by serif (24.8%) and script typefaces (7.9%). This pattern is maintained among the *Best Global Brands* (68.6% sans serif), while football clubs use only sans serif (60%) and serif (40%) typefaces.

The most frequent typeface weight is bold (58.4%), followed by regular (39.6%) and, only marginally, light (2%). Global brands make greater use of bold (62.8%), whereas football clubs predominantly use regular (66.7%).

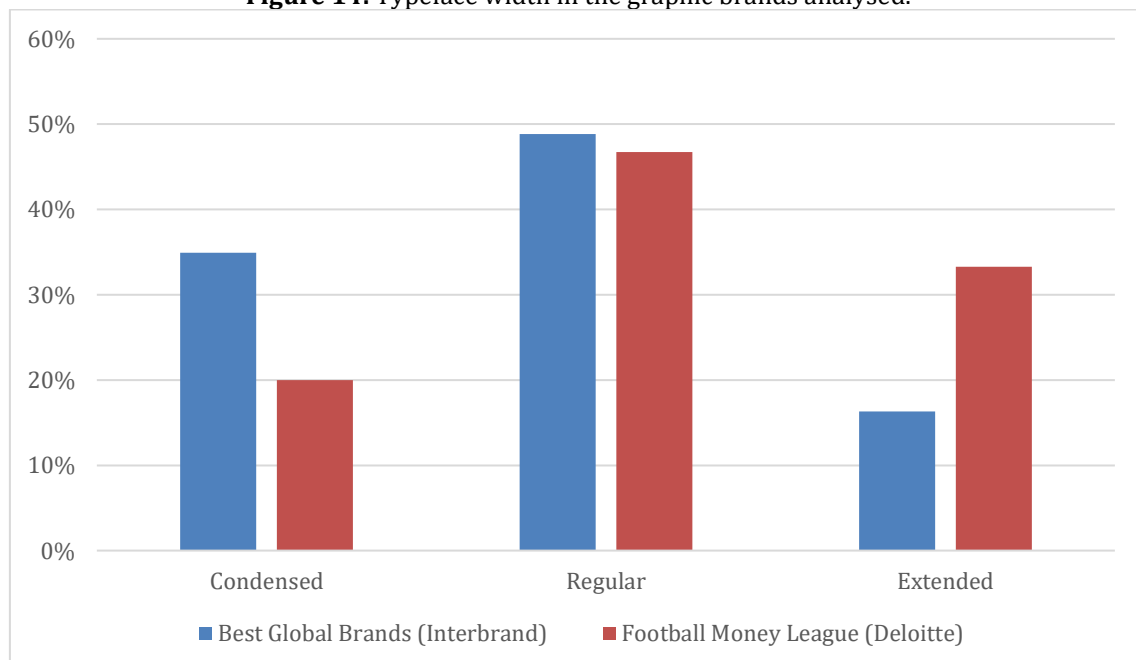
Figure 13. Typeface weight of the linguistic sign in the graphic brands analysed.



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Typeface slant is predominantly roman (82.2%), compared with 17.8% in italic or oblique styles, a trend that is particularly pronounced among football clubs (93.3%). The most frequent typeface width is regular (48.5%), followed by condensed (32.7%) and extended (18.8%). This pattern is observed in both the *Best Global Brands* (48.8%) and the *Football Money League* (46.7%), where extended ranks second (33.3%).

Figure 14. Typeface width in the graphic brands analysed.



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Among brands incorporating a linguistic sign, uppercase lettering predominates (59.4%), compared with lowercase lettering (40.6%). Among global brands, the distribution is relatively balanced (53.5% versus 46.5%), whereas uppercase lettering clearly predominates among football clubs (93.3%).

Finally, text positioning is predominantly centred (79.2%). This pattern is even more pronounced among the *Best Global Brands* (84.3%), whereas football clubs show an even distribution between centred and non-centred positions (50% each), with non-centred positioning on the vertical axis being particularly prevalent (93.3%).

4.4. Discussion of Results

The results confirm that the graphic brands of the world's most valuable global corporations and professional football clubs follow distinct visual logics directly linked to their strategic, cultural and symbolic contexts (Macías-Carrillo, 2016). This divergence is particularly significant when interpreted within the framework of the attention economy and through an understanding of the graphic brand as a strategic device for the visual translation of brand identity (Costa, 2014; Guld, 2023; Olins, 2009; Wang, 2024).

In the case of the *Best Global Brands* ranking, the results show a clear alignment with the principles of visual simplification, formal standardisation and perceptual efficiency described in the literature on digital branding (Getnet et al., 2025; Gregersen & Johansen, 2022; Slade-Brooking, 2016). The predominance of pure logotypes, geometric forms, two-dimensionality, horizontal proportions and symmetrical compositions confirms a strategic orientation towards legibility, cross-platform adaptability and rapid cognitive processing, all of which are especially relevant in digital environments characterised by brief, repeated and fragmented exposure (Henderson et al., 2004; Zhao & Meyer, 2007).

These findings reinforce the argument that visual simplification improves attentional and mnemonic effectiveness in contexts of communicative saturation (Melo, 2022; Suárez-Carballo et al., 2018). However, they may also be interpreted critically as evidence of a trend towards the visual homogenisation of global brands, whereby the pursuit of neutrality, flexibility and scalability may reduce some of the sign's symbolic density (Vieira, 2023). The visual effectiveness of contemporary corporate branding thus appears to rest on a delicate balance between strategic differentiation and formal standardisation (Bernal-Torres, 2025).

By contrast, the brands included in the *Football Money League* ranking display a clearly different formal model. The predominance of logo-symbols and standalone symbols, the extensive use of containers, the greater presence of asymmetry and the persistence of heraldic features point to a conception of the visual sign that is less oriented towards standardisation and more closely associated with symbolic expressiveness, identity narratives and historical tradition. This finding is consistent with the literature defining football clubs as cultural and identity-based brands deeply rooted in communities, territories and shared histories (Chadwick, 2022; Ginesta, 2017; Gómez-Bantel, 2016).

From an iconic perspective, the contrast is equally clear. The *Best Global Brands* show a marked preference for simple structures, with a predominance of a single iconic element and a notable presence of typographic and abstract brands with low symbolic density. By contrast, football clubs display greater iconic density, with two or more elements in most cases and a broader combination of cultural, social, historical, sporting and territorial references. This confirms that, in football, the graphic brand functions not only as a functional identifier but also as a narrative device capable of conveying memory, belonging and continuity (Giulianotti & Armstrong, 2013; Niemann et al., 2024).

With regard to colour, the contrast is again evident. The world's most valuable global corporations predominantly use restrained palettes, two-colour solutions and monochromatic or achromatic harmonies, in keeping with the principles of visual coherence, versatility and reduced cognitive load advocated in the literature on visual identity in digital environments (Sanz-Peralta et al., 2023; Wheeler & Meyerson, 2024). By contrast, the world's most valuable football clubs make far greater use of three or more colours and complex colour combinations, thereby reinforcing their capacity for emotional differentiation and visual spectacle within the competitive ecosystem of professional sport.

The linguistic sign also displays significant differences. In corporate brands, it performs a primarily denominative and rational function, with a predominance of the corporate name, sans

serif typefaces, centred compositions and a strong emphasis on legibility. In football clubs, by contrast, the linguistic sign performs a more identity-based than purely nominative function: popular names, acronyms, uppercase lettering and non-centred integration of text within the crest are more prevalent. The text is thus embedded within a visual logic rooted in heraldic and ceremonial traditions rather than one that is strictly functional (Michailidis, 2016; Jägerskiöld-Nilsson, 2023).

Overall, the comparison confirms that the two brand domains should not be understood as better or worse versions of the same visual logic, but as distinct strategic responses to different brand functions (Boyle & Haynes, 2009; Kapferer, 2012; Niemann et al., 2024). Global corporations prioritise perceptual efficiency, standardisation and adaptability. Football clubs, by contrast, prioritise symbolic density, historical continuity and the capacity for collective representation. The graphic brand thus emerges as a particularly revealing indicator of the tensions between simplification and memory, digital circulation and tradition, and visual effectiveness and cultural depth.

5. Conclusions

This study has conducted a systematic comparative analysis of the graphic brands of the world's most valuable global organisations (*Best Global Brands 2024*, Interbrand) and professional football clubs (*Football Money League*, Deloitte). The analysis of the 120 cases comprising the sample (equivalent to 100% of the population) provides a robust empirical basis for addressing the stated objectives.

(S01) The results show that the most valuable global brands follow a visual model oriented towards formal simplification and perceptual efficiency. The predominance of pure logotypes, geometric forms, two-dimensionality, horizontal proportions and symmetrical compositions demonstrates a clear alignment with the principles of contemporary digital branding, in which legibility, scalability and visual coherence are key strategic factors. This model responds to the need to operate effectively in saturated digital environments, where the graphic brand must function as an immediate and stable identifier across multiple media. By contrast, professional football club brands display a different formal pattern. The predominance of logo-symbols, extensive use of containers, preference for compact or vertical proportions and greater presence of asymmetrical compositions reflect a less standardised and more expressive visual model. In this context, the graphic brand not only identifies the organisation, but also represents and symbolises its historical trajectory and collective identity.

(S02) With regard to iconic complexity, the results confirm the coexistence of two symbolic construction strategies. Brands in the *Best Global Brands* ranking tend to reduce the number of iconic elements, with a predominance of typographic or abstract configurations of low semantic density. This simplification facilitates rapid cognitive processing and reinforces the role of the logotype as a perceptual shortcut within the attention economy. By contrast, the brands included in the *Football Money League* display greater iconic density, commonly incorporating two or more elements. This complexity fulfils a broader symbolic function: the graphic brand acts as a narrative device capable of integrating history, values, territory and emotion, thereby reinforcing identity-based ties with supporter communities.

(S03) The analysis of colour shows that it constitutes another differentiating element between the two brand domains. The most valuable global brands predominantly use restrained palettes, with a prevalence of two colours, achromatic or monochromatic solutions and a strong presence of white, black and blue. This strategy promotes visual coherence, versatility and adaptability to digital interfaces, while reducing the audience's cognitive load. By contrast, football clubs display greater chromatic richness, frequently using three or more colours and complex colour combinations. This chromatic intensity reinforces expressiveness, emotional differentiation and the spectacular nature of professional football as an entertainment industry.

(S04) Although the linguistic sign is present in most of the brands analysed, its function differs between the two contexts. In global brands, a primarily denominative and rational function predominates, based on the corporate name, sans serif typefaces, heavier typeface weights,

centred compositions and a relatively balanced use of uppercase lettering. These choices reinforce clarity, legibility and visual consistency. In football clubs, by contrast, the linguistic sign acquires a more pronounced identity-based dimension. Popular names and acronyms predominate, together with a near-universal use of uppercase lettering and greater diversity in text placement, integrated within a graphic composition with a strong symbolic charge.

(GO) Overall, the results confirm that the graphic brands of the world's most valuable global organisations and football clubs follow structurally distinct visual models. The global corporate model is characterised by simplification, standardisation and perceptual efficiency, in keeping with the demands of digital branding and the attention economy. The football identity-based model, by contrast, is defined by symbolic complexity, narrative density and the preservation of historical and cultural elements, with a strong presence of heraldic codes even in contexts of high international media exposure. These two models should not be understood as opposites, but as strategic responses that are coherent with different communication contexts, audiences and brand functions. The graphic brand thus emerges as a direct reflection of the cultural and strategic logics that structure contemporary branding.

The main limitations of the study include its cross-sectional nature, as it focuses on a specific point in time and therefore does not allow analysis of how graphic brands evolve over time. In addition, the analysis is based exclusively on formal and visual variables and does not incorporate audience perceptions or measures of communicative or emotional effectiveness.

Future research could develop longitudinal studies examining rebranding processes, as well as incorporate experimental or qualitative methodologies aimed at assessing the reception and impact of different visual models. It would also be relevant to extend the analysis to other areas of professional sport, cultural brands or hybrid organisations in order to deepen understanding of the visual logics operating within the contemporary attention economy.

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