ASME X IG
How Magazine Covers Shape the Composition and Narrative of Instagram Posts

Manuel Viñas Limonchi [1]
mvinas@usj.es
Lony Fernández Álvarez [2]
lfernandez@unapec.edu.do

[1] San Jorge University, Spain
[2] APEC University, Dominican Republic

ABSTRACT

Introduction: In 2005, the American Society of Magazine Editors (ASME) selected the forty most iconic magazine covers of the previous four decades. Among these, leading publications such as Time and Esquire have, since their inception, produced covers that transcend the boundaries of press design. Methodology: A content analysis is proposed, focusing on the compositional attributes present in these forty covers, interpreted as paradigmatic resources and as constructive elements of an Instagram post. Results: While the image remains unchanged in the post, the summary texts are positioned beneath it, serving as a lead, and the publication's visual identity is repositioned at the beginning of the reading path. Discussion: The graphic plasticity and informational dimension of the magazine cover transcend its original compositional framework, influencing the layout configuration of the post itself.

1. Introduction: Journalism and Design, Content, and Form

'Welcome to journalism through design' (Moen, 1995). This expressive phrase, written by Daryl Moen in one of his treatises on media practice, highlights the primacy of design in communication, where technical and creative aspects converge in the production of a publication, particularly within the press. In a similar historiographical vein, Jesús Zorrilla (2002) identified both a period and a consequence for the emergence of the alliance between journalism and design, noting that 'the 1980s marked a turning point: there was a boom in journalistic design. Almost overnight, newspapers around the world began to attach importance to the visual presentation of news messages.' Daniel Tena (2005) further emphasised that 'one of the objectives of visual communication is the production of images that impact recipients and elicit an emotion or tension' (p. 125).

As Laura González-Díez and Pedro Pérez-Cuadrado (2007) observe, 'the history of journalistic design is written in line with technological advances', closely echoing Núñez Ladevèze's (2002, p. 83) assertion that 'without technology there is no journalism' (p. 9). This technological progress, channelled through the precepts of graphic design, was strengthened in the mid-1950s by a number of disciplines that supported communicative work. Among these, according to Jorge Frascara (2005), 'we can recognise experimental psychology, social psychology (...) marketing studies carried out for advertising agencies and consumer product manufacturers, and studies in linguistics, rhetoric and semiotics, which would develop more intensively in the 1960s' (p. 44).

Consequently, González-Díez and Pérez-Cuadrado (2007) propose that 'journalistic design could be considered the graphic interpretation of the journalistic message under functional criteria of legibility, proportion, periodicity, style, and economy of the medium in which it is developed. This would implicitly include much more modern media: audiovisual and Internet' (p. 9). The notion of legibility, inherited from the 'perception studies [that] initiated new trends in design in general during the 1950s' (Frascara, 2005, p. 44), is one that persists today in digital media.

This attention to perceptual design was already evident on the covers of *Time* magazine. The systematic optics applied to its front pages by one of its most prominent illustrators, Ernest H. Baker, exemplify this principle. Baker incorporated 'millimetric fillets that descended in a gradient from the four sides onto the main image, thus enhancing the centre of the magazine and guiding the reader's eye towards it' (Angeletti & Oliva, 2002, p. 44). This approach is particularly evident in such iconic covers as the July 1946 issue, featuring a portrait of Albert Einstein set against a background depicting the well-known formula of relativity alongside the characteristic mushroom cloud of the atomic bomb.

This same technological evolution, in its various instrumental and procedural forms, enabled the incorporation of graphic resources into newspaper and magazine covers, through both photographic and illustrative processes, enhancing the visual coding of the message and, consequently, attracting and diversifying information consumers. Technology has also increased the immediacy of visual message consumption, a phenomenon omnipresent in the particular affordances of social networks and in the preferences of an audience that increasingly favours viewing over reading. Responding to this shift, Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger launched an innovative social network in October 2010: Instagram. Its principal function was disarmingly simple and direct, to share images.

Ranked among the most influential of its kind, this application encapsulates the adage attributed to American editor and journalist Arthur Brisbane (1911): 'A picture is worth a thousand words.' This visually oriented statement was articulated by Brisbane in March 1911 in a speech entitled *Use a Picture. It's Worth a Thousand Words,* delivered to communicators at the Syracuse Advertising Men's Club, underscoring the enduring communicative power of images.

Embodied in media assets, graphic resources are integrated into social chronicles, thereby substantiating the communicative order, yet they do not operate in isolation.

In April 1966, at the dawn of the cybernetic age, *Time* magazine published an unusual and controversial cover. It was unusual because it was the first publication of its kind to forgo the persuasive power of a strong image on its cover, replacing it instead with a simple headline. The phrase 'Is God Dead?', stamped in purple Roman type on a black background, appeared on the front of one of the world's most prestigious news magazines. The cover introduced the theories of that prophet of anti-clerical wisdom, Nietzsche, articulated almost a century earlier by the German philosopher himself in *The Gay Science.* Three years later, after generating vast debate and commentary, *Time* transformed the

headline into 'Is God Coming Back to Life?', now rendered in grotesque typefaces (Viñas-Limonchi, 2013).

Text, as the syntactic and semantic indicator of communication, has always played a central role. Formerly, when newspapers avoided graphic resources for technical reasons, and now, when they serve as prescribers of their own visual identity, text possesses both methodological and informational authority in the construction of communication standards across social media, particularly in posts. Within digital environments characterised by open iconographic design, typography asserts its communicative strength. As Nick Mahon (2010) notes, 'one of the most important tasks of an art director is ensuring that text and image work well together and do not compete with each other'. This principle is encapsulated in the corporate slogan of another illustrious news magazine, *Paris Match*, "the weight of words, the shock of photos". It was also championed by one of the most influential art directors in the communications industry, George Lois, who made "the bold combination of image and word his secret weapon, with which he challenged the limits that had been established until then" (Gràffica, 2022).

The convergence of journalism, design, and technology has transformed the ways in which news is consumed and has influenced the behaviour of contemporary audiences. Although these audiences are generally more inclined towards the visual than the textual, they continue to rely on text or on the codes articulated by the sender as the essential framework through which to validate the iconographic narrative and engage with content. These principles, originating in the traditional press, find one of their most significant contemporary expressions in digital media such as Instagram, an online platform in which the image stands as the primary, though not the sole, communicative element that consolidates its power within an interconnected society.

## 1.1. ASME: Forty Covers, Forty Icons

Founded in 1963, the American Society of Magazine Editors (ASME) 'is the leading organisation of editorial leaders of magazines and websites published in the United States, supporting the development of journalism and promoting the editorial integrity of print and digital publications' (ASME). One of its most recognised initiatives, which celebrates the journalistic achievements of the most influential publications in the media sector, is the ASME *Best Cover Contest*. This competition awards prizes to the front pages of the most representative magazines of the year.

In its first edition, held in 2005, members of the professional association selected the forty best covers, in fact forty-one, published over the previous four decades (Figure 1). As recorded on their website:

> On 17 October 2005, at the American Magazine Conference (AMC) held at the Wyndham El Conquistador in Puerto Rico, the 40 best magazine covers of the last 40 years were announced. The news was presented by Mark Whitaker, president of ASME and editor of *Newsweek*, and Evan Smith, president of AMC and editor of *Texas Monthly* (ASME, 2025).

In this instance, 'a jury composed of 52 editors and directors of design, art, and photography were responsible for selecting the best covers from among 444 entries representing 136 magazines published in the United States' (EFE, 2005). During the selection process, the committee of experts evaluated those covers whose content transcended purely graphic and textual aspects, endorsing them for their cultural impact, historical significance and, importantly, visual excellence.

Occupying first place was the iconic cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine from 22 January 1981, which depicts John Lennon embracing Yoko Ono shortly before his murder by Mark D. Chapman. The image, captured by Annie Leibovitz, became emblematic not only for its poignancy but also for addressing the controversial issue of Lennon's relationship with Yoko Ono, which had sparked tensions within *The Beatles*, although other factors also contributed to the band's eventual dissolution (ABC, 2020).

Figure 1. Covers in order of award in the ASME Best Cover Contest, 2005.
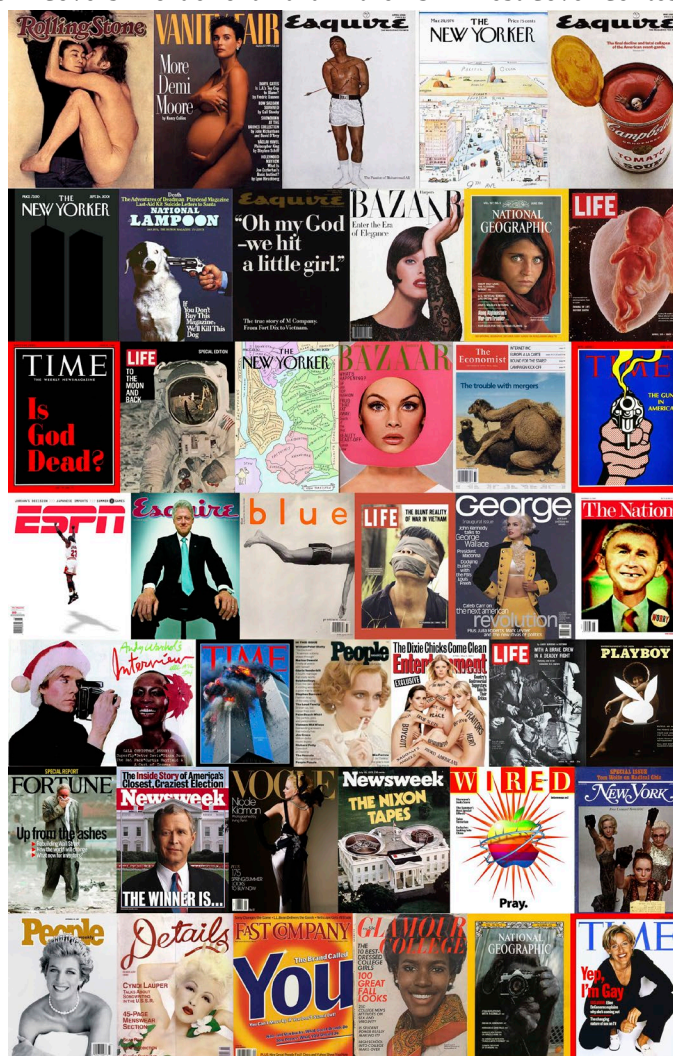
Source: Authors elaboration and authorship of the corresponding publishers, 2024.

This disapproval was projected onto Yoko Ono, who was also portrayed on the third cover in this selection. For the occasion, the aforementioned G. Lois featured Muhammad Ali on the front page of *Esquire* magazine (April 1968 issue), symbolically struck by the dates of his refusal to fight in the Vietnam War, attributes that characterise the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian. The headline on the front page, 'The Passion of Muhammad Ali', introduced Leonard Shecter's article (1968) with the following subtitle: 'The former world heavyweight champion is currently wandering around Chicago, more or less in exile, because he doesn't want to go. He's not joking.'

Two chronicles and graphic frames that are completely different from those attributed to the second cover in this ranking, once again by Annie Leibovitz. In this case, the cover of *Vanity Fair* from August 1991 shows a delicate image of Demi Moore pregnant, establishing, in a way, a pose and almost a new artistic genre on the covers of the most well-known publications.

The ASME selection highlights front pages that marked a milestone in the visual culture that permeates the narrative of contemporary journalism, underlining the importance of photography and illustration in graphic communication, as well as their ability to convey concepts that endure over time. Each of these covers encourages the adoption of individual opinions, ensuring, however, that their images and texts are now part of the collective memory that nourishes the chronicle of history.

'Don't judge a book by its cover,' says the popular saying that invites us to delve deeper into the content rather than the container. However, individuals and society itself prioritise visual aspects. Ultimately, this reality is exploited by the press, especially magazines, turning their covers into enduring cultural icons. Covers, in paper or digital format, exert an extraordinary degree of persuasion, establishing themselves as one of the most genuine standards of visual communication. Not surprisingly, art director Roger Black, in his 'ten commandments of design', specifically in the seventh, stated that 'a

cover has to be a poster. A single image of a human being will sell more magazines than multiple images of another type. It has always been this way. Ask yourself why' (Mahon, 2010). In this selection of ASME covers, 68% of the covers contain, either partially or entirely, the image of a person or group.

1.2. The 'New' Territories of Information

Regarding social network analysis in the social and behavioural sciences, Stanley Wasserman and Katherine Faust (2013) assert that 'the notion of social networks and methods of social network analysis have attracted considerable interest and curiosity from the social and behavioural sciences community in recent decades' (p. 35). This interest is also evident in the domains of communicative persuasion, activating the collective imagination that evokes that panoramic view of publications organised by theme that still lines newsstands, now filled with the array of standards gathered on the Internet, where users navigate an extensive sea of digital publications that increasingly offer them unique features capable of persuading them and drawing them into their commercial domains.

Traditional websites and blogs, the original medium for online dissemination used by the news media, have been joined by digital platforms for paid content, which operate as genuine newsstands containing their editorial products. In this century, a strong communicative and, therefore, commercial ally has emerged in the form of social networks, which are remarkably user-friendly, particularly in tasks that encourage interaction, generating significant corporate loyalty among users. These and other reasons give rise to the need to explore new technical and creative routines for the design of their graphical interfaces, contributing to the unavoidable quality of information demanded by the dissemination of current news. Thus, the presence of applications such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram on the media scene requires ongoing scrutiny of their graphical protocols through systematic design. Incidentally, Instagram, discussed in this article, has become, according to the *Digital 2024* report, 'the world's favourite social network this year' (We Are Social, 2024).

Graphic design in the context of publishing is a discipline that, based on its most normative precepts, provides informative coverage for the journalistic cause, ensuring that the degree of persuasion inherent in the design of newspaper and magazine covers aligns with, and even exceeds, the intrinsic level of information that identifies them as a journalistic paradigm. The design elements included in these front pages have an unavoidable aesthetic appeal, largely capturing the consumer's propensity towards the iconography that illustrates the story on the front page: 'The first and most important part of any publication in which the brand image and the values associated with it must be stamped is the cover,' says Yolanda Zappaterra (2008, p. 29).

This interest is channelled on the Internet through the main social networks, heirs to the pioneering GeoCities and SixDegrees of the mid-1990s, placing the publication within a repository of communicative assets that is continuously updated and requires that degree of conviction which, as Zorrilla (2002) states, 'introduces the reader to the second phase of the communication process'. These platforms operate within an eminently visual and multimedia space, structured around the four strategies of hypertextual reading described by Ray McAleese (1999):

Scanning. The reader searches for specific content and attempts to locate it by skimming through the highlights.

Browsing. The reader moves around without a specific objective, aiming to gain a general idea of the whole.

Searching. The reader has a particular interest and focuses on it, being familiar with the hypertext they are navigating.

Wandering**.** The reader moves aimlessly; the pleasure of reading depends more on movement and change than on the information obtained. Wandering is often undesirable, resulting from an inability to apply the above strategies.

In terms of both information and editorial design, the image, headline, and lead are essential components and, as such, paradigmatic in the structure of the post, conceived as an adaptation of the traditional media chronicle that responds to the demands of contemporary news consumption. Within this context, each element performs a specific function in concert with the others, ensuring the effectiveness of the overall message.

Briefly:

The image, beyond illustrating and narrating, operates as a visual connection point that focuses and synthesises the content of the news item. Its selection is never arbitrary; it must be relevant, meaningful and visually striking, seeking to capture the reader's attention from the outset. As J. García-López (2020) observes, 'the image becomes a fundamental resource for conveying an idea, allowing the public to read the information more deeply' (p. 56).

Characterised by conciseness, the headline condenses the essence of the news into a few clear and compelling words. According to A. Martínez-Pérez (2019), 'the headline must capture the reader's attention, be precise and generate curiosity, while optimising its visibility on digital platforms' (p. 22).

Finally, the lead, an equally essential part of the informative post, summarises the key aspects of the story, preserving the tradition of journalistic reporting while adapting to the demands of the digital reader. As L. Rodríguez-Sánchez (2021) notes, 'the lead should not only answer the basic questions of who, what, when, where, and why, but do so quickly and directly, adapting to the reduced format of the post' (p. 44).

Together, these elements form a coherent graphic structure that enables information to be conveyed efficiently and attractively. In an environment saturated with content, where the reader's attention span is limited and visual distractions are constant, the image, headline and lead emerge as the pillars of a message that, in addition to the recurring goal of informing, must also sustain the audience's attention.

2. Objectives

The main purpose of this research is to examine the graphic language used in the layout of an Instagram post, drawing on the essence and specific methods of journalistic design employed in the composition of magazine covers. Several specific objectives are also established, aligning procedurally and evolutionarily with Bruno Munari's (2016) assertion that 'all design, even the most innovative, follows existing models, codes, forms, and genres. These models constitute the entire network of our visual language, which is constantly evolving and expanding.' These considerations are reflected in the following specific objectives:

- Specific objective 1: To demonstrate how new digital formats in journalistic communication derive from the techniques and creativity developed through classical procedures of the discipline, as summarised in the style guides of each publication.
- Specific objective 2: To assess the informative value, sometimes surpassing the compositional value, of the graphic resources used on each cover in the 2005 edition of the ASME Best Cover Competition, with the visual narrative serving as a determining factor in the technical evaluation conducted by the professional body.
- Specific objective 3: To highlight the synchrony between traditional press models and the most recent digital identity models, aiming to fulfil the compositional and informative resolution of the chronicle, as revealed in the covers of renowned magazines.
- Specific objective 4: To develop a tool for categorising, comparing, and analysing the graphic, typographic, and informative attributes of the covers selected by the ASME, enabling their analysis and compositional adaptation for Instagram post layouts.

3. Methodology: Covers that are Posts

Edmund Arnold (1969) argues that 'functional journalistic design is a philosophy that insists that every printed element, and every arrangement of those elements, must perform a necessary task in the most efficient manner.' This idea is adopted in the present research as an introduction to a compositional narrative that draws on the attributes of a magazine cover, transforming them into binary material of a graphic and typographic nature with an informative purpose, designed to define the anatomy of an Instagram post.

For Mario García (1993), 'the newspaper, rather than being put together, must be designed (...) design involves a prior consideration of how each of these elements will look, where they will be placed, and what effect they will have on the overall appearance of the page.' That same page is now confined to an electronic domain which, according to Cebrián Herreros (2005), 'can offer a graphic, a few lines or written outlines, indexes, a drawing, [or] a photograph. Its complexity and composition are determined by the clarity of the information' (p. 64).

Thus, in the early days of social media, Jesús Zorrilla (2002) asserted that 'we have managed to design newspapers; now we need to design information.' This information is presented in the form of short

messages published on social media. As Cabrera Méndez (2012) argues, 'new media have their own language and communication and content characteristics that differ from traditional media. Today, these new media, which could also be called digital media, coexist with traditional media, influencing them more and more each day' (p. 25).

In short, this research concerns a repertoire of channels, media, and corporations that integrate into the communication equation the demands of the main actor, once known as the reader. Today, this actor is an active participant in social media and online platforms, dominated since the beginning of the twenty-first century by the emergence and subsequent popularisation of social networks. In any case, this activity is essential, contributing, as López-Sobejano (2012) suggests, 'a profile consistent with the user's online presence strategy' (p. 161).

However, as Charles Kadushin (2013) warns when referring to networks as a research model, his 'analysis is not a study of individuals, nor a study of groups, organisations and institutions. It is both' (p. 263). Within this methodological framework, design, mediated by image and text, becomes a decisive creative catalyst in the sharing of content among communicative archetypes, in this case between media channels of a journalistic nature.

Specifically, therefore, the system establishes a method of intervention in the study model that applies content analysis to the iconographic, typographic, and informational attributes present in the forty-one covers selected in 2005 by the ASME. These are interpreted as a paradigmatic resource that can be implemented in a social network, specifically as constructive elements of a post linked to Instagram. The media themselves appeal to this idea, recognising that 'the front page becomes a window through which not only personalities pass, but also everything that changes the world and the way we live' (*El País*, 2013). Hence the importance, as now, of 'turning it into a space open to experimentation' (*El País*, 2013).

4. Results

4.1. Procedure: On Content Analysis

Cebrián Herreros (2005) maintains that:

> Interactive narrative is based on a unified and coherent conception composed of multiple isolated or interdependent fragments and takes the form of a dialogical proposal of various options offered by the designer to users of an isolated multimedia medium or on the Internet through links between different parts (p. 137).

This proposal and the resulting itinerary weave together a composition that is, as such, dialogical, where the image remains unchanged in the post, while the texts of the summary are arranged below it, as a lead, and the corporate visual identity of the publication migrates to the initial space of the reading itinerary, to that primary optical area of a publication described by Edmund Arnold.

Introducing the subject matter, the items detailed in Table 1 serve as descriptive parameters for the content analysis applied to this research. This procedure seeks to establish a correspondence between the initial study universe, specifically, the covers of renowned international magazines selected in 2005 by the ASME as journalistic icons of the previous four decades, and their compositional and informative transcription as a method of creating and reading a post for Instagram. A brief description of these parameters, defined around a communicative taxonomy that arranges them within the corporate, graphic, and typographic aspects of the magazine, and in relation to their correspondence and interpretation on Instagram, results in the following framework:

- *Magazine*: Name of the publication.
- *Ranking*: Position of the magazine cover in the repertoire established by the ASME.
- *Date*: Publication date of the specific issue of the magazine.
- *Cover graphic technique:* Graphic procedure applied to the cover, reduced to a photograph, illustration, or text, and rendered in colour or black and white.
- *Corporate visual identity (CVI):* From the cover to the Instagram profile, consistency between the magazine's original corporate elements and its Instagram account, considering three correspondences:

- ▪ Original: Practically complete analogy between the magazine's CVI and its Instagram profile. For example, in *Time* (Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Time* logo in magazine (top) and on Instagram profile (bottom).

Source: *Time*, October 2024.

- ▪ Logo summary: Graphic modification of the magazine's CVI, abbreviated in its acronym(s) and used as the profile image on Instagram. For example, in *Rolling Stone* (Figure 3).

Figure 3. *Rolling Stone* logo in magazine (top) and on Instagram profile (bottom).

Source: *Rolling Stone*, October 2024.

- ▪ Logo to isotype : Graphic conversion, specifically into a pictogram, of the magazine's original logo, for inclusion as an image on its Instagram profile. For example, in *The New Yorker* (figure 4).

Figure 4. *The New Yorker* logo in the magazine (top) and on the Instagram profile (bottom).

Source: *The New Yorker*, October 2024.

- • *Iconography.* Magazine cover content: Informative content presented on the cover, summarised either through a visual plan of the protagonists of the news story or of the article itself, excluding, in the latter case, the presence of people.
  - ▪ Correspondence in the Instagram post: Mimesis of the cover image.
- • *Typography.* Main headline and total number of headlines on the cover: Presence of a principal headline dedicated to the cover story, as well as, in some cases, additional summaries.
  - ▪ Correspondence in the Instagram post: Construction of the post header based on the headlines appearing on the specific magazine issue.
- • *Metadata for the main topic.* Instagram lead: Description of the topic on the magazine cover as registered on the ASME website.
  - ▪ Correspondence in the Instagram post: List of hashtags that could be included as illustrative text in the post.

Table 1. Content analysis of the covers selected by the ASME

Magazine #Ranking Cover date	Cover graphic technique	Corporate Visual Identity (CVI): Cover to IG profile	Iconography: Cover content	Typography: Main headline *Total headlines	Main topic metadata: Instagram *lead*
Rolling Stone #1 January 1981	Colour photograph	Logo synthesis	Person	Non-headlines	John Lennon / Yoko Ono / Annie Leibovitz
Vanity Fair #2 August 1991	Colour photograph	Logo synthesis	Person	"More Demi Moore" *6 headlines	Pregnant Demi Moore / Ghost / Hollywood
Esquire #3 April 1968	Colour photograph	Logo synthesis	Person	"The passion of Muhammad Ali" *1 headline	Muhammad Ali / U.S. Army / St. Sebastian's martyrdom
The New Yorker #4 March 1976	Colour illustration	Logo to isotype	Theme	No headlines	9th Avenue / Manhattan / Mental geography
Esquire #5 May 1969	Colour photograph	Logo synthesis	Person	"The final decline and total collapse of the American avant-garde" *1 headline	Andy Warhol / Campbell Soup / Pop Art
The New Yorker #6 September 2001	Black and white illustration	Logo to isotype	Theme	No headlines	9-11 / Twin Towers / The blackness
Nat. Lampoon #7 January 1973	Colour photograph	Logo to isotype	Theme	"If you don't buy this magazine, we'll kill this dog" *5 headlines	Pop culture / Counterculture / Politics
Esquire #8 October 1966	Black and white text	Logo summary	Theme	"Oh, my God – We hit a little girl. The true story of M Company. From Fort Dix to Vietnam" *1 headline	John Sack / Vietnam War / New Journalism
Harper's Bazaar #9 September 1992	Colour photograph	Original	Person	"Enter the era of elegance" *1 headline	Fashion / Liz Tilberis / Linda Evangelista
Nat. Geographic #10 June 1985	Colour photograph	Logo to isotype	Person	"Along Afghanistan's War-torn frontier" *5 headlines	Steve McCurry / Afghanistan / Refugee
Life #11 April 1965	Colour photograph	Original	Person	"Drama of life before birth" *1 headline	Linnart Nilsson / Human life / Photography
Time #12 April 1966	Colour text	Original	Subject	"Is God dead?" *1 headline	God / Christian theologians / Religion
Life #13 Special Edition 1969	Colour photograph	Original	Person	"To the Moon and back" *1 headline	Moon landing / Apollo 11 / Astronauts
The New Yorker #14 December 2001	Colour illustration	Logo to isotype	Theme	"New Yorkistan" *1 headline	New Yorkistan / New York City / Saul Steinberg
Harper's Bazaar #15 April 1965	Colour photograph	Original	Person	"Beauty Blast-Off: Lunar Glow" *3 headlines	Jean Shrimpton / R. Avedon / Day-Glo space helmet
The Economist #16 September 1994	Colour photograph	Logo synthesis	Subject	"The trouble with mergers" *5 headlines	Mergers / Economy / Controversial
Time #17 June 1968	Colour illustration	Original	Subject	"The gun in America" *1 headline	Roy Lichtenstein / Gun Control Act / Assassination

Magazine #Ranking Cover date	Cover graphic technique	Corporate Visual Identity (CVI): Cover to IG profile	Iconography: Cover content	Typography: Main headline *Total headlines	Main topic metadata: Instagram *lead*
ESPN Magazine #18 June 1998	Colour photograph	Logo synthesis	Person	"Jordan's decision" *3 headlines	Michael Jordan / Chicago Bulls / Washington Wizards
Esquire #19 December 2000	Colour photograph	Logo synthesis	Person	Non-headlines	Bill Clinton / Lincoln Memorial / Monica Lewinsky
Blue #20 October 1997	Black and white photograph	No IG	Person	Not featured	David Carson / Lifestyle magazine / Culture
Life #21 November 1965	Colour photograph	Original	Subject	"The blunt reality of war in Vietnam" *1 headline	Paul Schutzer / Vietcong / Six-Day War
George #22 October 1995	Colour photograph	No IG	Person	"Caleb Carr on the next American revolution" *5 headlines	Cindy Crawford / George Washington / John F. Kennedy Jr.
The Nation #23 November 2000	Colour photograph	Logo synthesis	Person	Non-headlines	George Bush / U.S. presidential election / Alfred E. Neuman
Interview #24 December 1972	Colour photograph	Original	Person	"Gala Christmas Issue!!!" *6 headlines	Andy Warhol / Grace Jones / Celebrities
Time #25 September 2001	Colour photograph	Original	Subject	"11 September 2001" *1 headline	World Trade Centre / 11 September 2001 / Tragedy
People #26 March 1974	Colour photograph	Original	Person	*"Mia Farrow: In 'Gatsby', the year's next big film"* *13 headlines*	Mia Farrow / The Great Gatsby / Celebrity culture
Entertainment Weekly #27 May 2003	Colour photograph	Logo synthesis	Person	"The Dixie Chicks come clean: Country's controversial superstars take on their critics" *1 headline	The Dixie Chicks / Invasion of Iraq / George Bush
Life #28 April 1965	Black and white photograph	Original	Subject	"With a brave crew in a deadly fight: Vietcong zero in on vulnerable U.S. copters" *1 headline	Larry Burrows / Vietcong / Helicopter squadron
Playboy #29 October 1971	Colour photograph	Logo to isotype	Person	Non-headline cover story *5 headlines	Darine Stern / African-American model / Len Willis
Fortune #29 October 2001	Colour photograph	Logo synthesis (font change)	Theme	"Up from the ashes" *4 headlines	Terrorist attacks / 11 September 2001 / New York
Newsweek #31 November 2000	Colour photograph	Logo synthesis	Person	"The winner is..." *2 headlines	George W. Bush / Al Gore / Presidential election
Vogue #32 May 2004	Colour photograph	Original	Person	"Nicole Kidman photographed by Irving Penn" *2 headlines	Irving Penn / Nicole Kidman / Christian Lacroix
Newsweek #33 July 1973	Colour photograph	Logo synthesis	Subject	"The Nixon tapes" *1 headline	Watergate Scandal / Richard Nixon / Gerald Ford

| Magazine #Ranking Cover date	Cover graphic technique	Corporate Visual Identity (CVI): Cover to IG profile	Iconography: Cover content	Typography: Main headline *Total headlines	Main topic metadata: Instagram *lead*
Wired #33 June 1997	Colour illustration	Logo to isotype	Theme	"Pray." *5 headlines	Steve Jobs / Apple Computer / Economy
New York #35 June 1970	Colour photograph	Original	Person	"Free Leonard Bernstein!" *2 headlines	The Black Panthers / Leonard Bernstein / Ideology
People #36 September 1997	Black and white photograph	Original	Person	Non-headlines	Princess Diana / Prince Charles / Funeral
Details #37 February 1989	Colour photograph	No IG	Person	"Cyndi Lauper talks about song writing in the USSR" *5 headlines	Cyndi Lauper / Cold Sky / USSR
Fast Company #37 August 1997	Colour text	Logo summary (font change)	Theme	"The brand called you: You can't move up if you don't stand out!" *6 headlines	Brand / Professional life / Tom Peters
Glamour #37 August 1968	Colour photograph	Original (change of source)	Person	"The 10 best-dressed college girls" *5 headlines	Katiti Kirondi II / African-American woman / Fashion
Nat. Geographic #37 October 1978	Black and white photograph	Logo to isotype	Theme	"Conversations with a gorilla" *6 headlines	Koko the gorilla / Psychology research / Francine Patterson
Time #37 April 1997	Colour photograph	Original	Person	"Yep, I'm gay" *3 headlines	Ellen DeGeneres / Gay star / Television

Source: Authors elaboration, 2024.

4.2. Results: Instagram Layout

Understood as an editorial composition task, this study focuses on the field of journalistic design from its most classical perspective. Specifically, it considers a printed magazine cover projected into a digital medium such as Instagram. A review of the parameters codified in the content analysis in Table 1 suggests the establishment of a grid within the publication and the corresponding post. This grid, in the words of Tena Parera (2005), 'would divide the graphic space to facilitate the placement of graphic elements, give them structural coherence and thus enhance visual perception' (p. 105).

The analysis of the covers selected by the ASME, as outlined in the table of contents and taking as a sample the award-winning number 1 cover associated with *Rolling Stone* (January 1981), reveals various interesting patterns that influence the interaction between the graphic, iconographic and typographic elements adapted to the informational and cultural landscape of their corresponding eras. This analysis makes it possible to observe how the graphic technique and corporate visual identity of each magazine contribute to the transmission of its message and to the construction of its image in the collective imagination (Pérez-Ramírez, 2023).

In terms of the graphic technique underpinning the visual representation, the cover of *Rolling Stone* features a colour photograph that stands out for its high visual impact. The image of John Lennon embracing Yoko Ono is not only a graphic testimony to an icon of the music industry, but also conveys impressions rooted in a popular culture strongly influenced by the artistic and sociological variants of pop trends. Photography, the technical foundation on which the birth and evolution of Instagram rest, thus becomes a predominant graphic technique on the covers distinguished by the ASME, a powerful tool that not only seeks to illustrate but also to emotionally engage the viewer.

Figure 5. ASME ranking 1st place cover: *Rolling Stone* magazine, 1981.
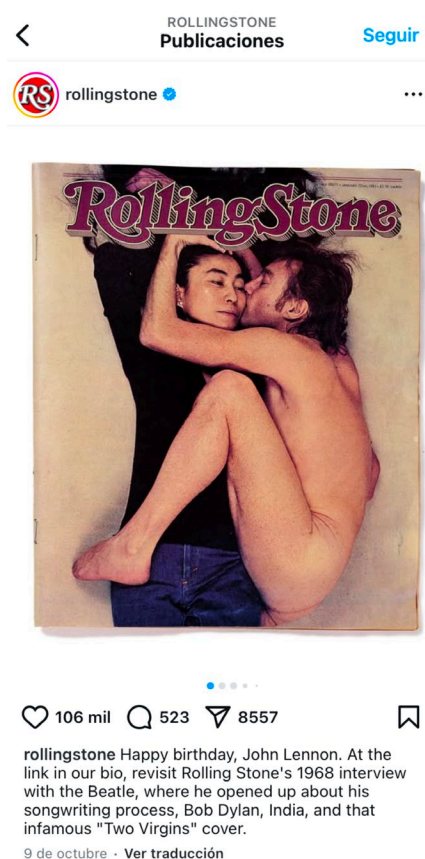
Source: *Rolling Stone* (Instagram), October 2024.

An analysis of the corporate visual identity stamped on the covers reveals a trend, shown in Table 1, towards logo simplification in most magazines, including the top three on the list: *Rolling Stone*, *Vanity Fair* and *Esquire*. In this regard, as A. Wheeler (2021) points out, 'visual identity must be flexible, consistent and easily recognisable across multiple platforms, driving the trend towards simplified designs that adapt to both digital and physical environments'.

The iconographic mechanism plays a fundamental role in the construction of content. The cover of *Rolling Stone* uses the image of a celebrity, John Lennon, to establish the main visual axis. This choice reinforces the relationship between the magazine and music culture, appealing to a figure who had already become a cultural symbol, and highlights the expressive pre-eminence of the human figure in the iconographic representation of an Instagram post.

As in other issues, the *Rolling Stone* cover is free of typographical features alluding to the activity of the headlines, thereby emphasising the centrality of the image. This compositional model, devoid of communicative material, proves attractive for both print and digital media. This stands in stark contrast to the cover of *Vanity Fair* featuring Demi Moore, second in the ASME ranking, where typography becomes a tool to accentuate the message of the cover (Muñoz-Torres, 2022).

The metadata that extracts and describes the main theme of the summary is key to understanding how the magazine links its content to current social commentary. On the cover of *Rolling Stone*, the terms 'John Lennon', 'Yoko Ono', and 'Annie Leibovitz', all proper names, act as interpretative guides that frame the visual content within a cultural and emotional context, inviting the reader to reflect on the meaning of the image and the significance of the moment in which it was captured (Pérez-Ramírez, 2023). Present in the layout of the Instagram post, they introduce the textual content and the narrative of the chronicle. Preceded by the symbols @ and #, they also function as thesauruses materialised in natural links with their thematic or personal references.

A quick glance at this *Rolling Stone* cover, photographed by Annie Leibovitz and adopted here as an archetype that underscores the synchrony between traditional press models and contemporary digital identity models, reveals the inescapable correspondence between iconographic and textual content. These elements, in conjunction with corporate visual identity, converge in the communicative

and persuasive impact that publications seek to achieve in any of their informational formats. Every element, from a photograph or illustration to linguistic expressions presented as metadata, is essential for constructing a message that resonates with audiences and endures over time as a cultural icon (Pérez-Ramírez, 2023).

5. Discussion

The graphic plasticity and informative dimension of the publication's cover, conceived and disseminated through procedures and channels associated with the print media, transcend this atavistic compositional framework to configure, now in the digital domain, the layout of a post. The most recurrent formats within the creative sphere of communication, based on the versatility of archetypes such as the ubiquitous poster, omnipresent in the professional activity of art directors, have found new exhibition spaces, primarily within social networks. As Mahon (2010) notes, the poster 'allows them to use all their skills to communicate a message through a unique and memorable graphic image'. These traditional formats are being replaced by others that are 'digitally animated, challenging the traditional concept of art direction and pushing it into new territories' (Mahon, 2010). These are spaces where the aesthetics and informative dimension inherent in this type of classic communication converge with the mechanics of user–machine interaction made possible by online applications. Since the 1990s, the transfer of journalistic information to electronic environments has meant the acceptance of a space and time for experimentation that is home to innovative technical procedures, supported by the compositional and informative evidence of the design work that has resolved, from the norm, the page architecture of newspapers and magazines.

In that final decade of the twentieth century, the capacity to store a huge and heterogeneous amount of information in digital channels did not, in any case, lead to an excessive insertion of content linked to current events. The journalistic orthodoxy attributed to such prestigious newspapers as *USA Today* and *The New York Times* already allowed for a rational dosage of the volume of information that could be accommodated within the vast digital territory occupied by the Internet. This task can be attributed to the process of selecting, editing, and laying out information which, when applied to the analysis of the covers selected in 2005 by the ASME, reveals, for example, the graphic synthesis of the magazine's original corporate headline, resolved on Instagram as a graphic abbreviation, such as an isotype in *The National Lampoon*, or as a typographic abbreviation, such as a logo in *Esquire*, of the header's identifying label.

An axiom revealed at the end of the last century stated that 'the possibilities offered by Information and Communication Technologies represent a qualitative change in processes rather than in products' (Cabero, 1998). Thus, research such as this, based on a methodological progression tracing the migration of information from a traditional press standard, still current in its printed format, such as magazines, to a digitally based communication model such as Instagram, reveals significant transformations. Since its emergence in 2010, Instagram has evolved considerably within the field of social media, further highlighting the impact of this shift.

In the first episode of the documentary series *Abstract: The Art of Design* (Netflix, 2019), Christoph Niemann noted that 'every idea requires a specific amount of information (sometimes more, sometimes less)'. This approach aligns with the adaptability of graphic and typographic assets to different contexts and platforms. It is demonstrated by Niemann's own creative intervention, based on the visual capabilities of augmented reality, on a cover for *The New Yorker* magazine. This is undoubtedly a clear example of the expansive potential of images within advanced technological environments.

In the context of the analysis presented in this article, the research reveals the ability of images to synthesise complex meanings and transcend cultural barriers, reaffirming their central role in visual communication and emphasising Brisbane's famous maxim, quoted in the introduction to this text, referring to 'a picture is worth a thousand words'. This reality underscores their universal power to convey messages that transcend linguistic and temporal limitations. In this regard, a particularly iconic case among the covers selected in 2005 by the ASME is that of *National Geographic*, which, under the title *Along Afghanistan's War-torn Frontier* (1985), uses the graphic synopsis of the gaze to capture and reveal the emotional argument that connects with the public. This approach, minimalist and rich in visual semantics, finds its parallel in the design of Instagram posts, reaffirmed as contemporary reinterpretations of the newspaper cover, where hierarchy and graphic synthesis converge with

technological versatility to maximise communicative impact on increasingly fragmented and dynamic audiences.

6. Acknowledgements

References

ABC. (2020, abril 11). *John Lennon y Yoko Ono, la historia de un amor legendario.* ABC. https://bit.ly/3Jk3eFn

Angeletti, N., & Oliva, A. (2002). *Revistas que hacen e hicieron historia.* Sol 90 Media.

Arnold, E. (1969). *Modern Newspaper Design.* Harper and Row.

ASME. (2025). *American Society of Magazine Editors (Home).* https://www.asme.media

Brisbane, A. (1911, marzo 28). Use a picture. It's worth a thousand words. *Syracuse Post-Standard*, p. 18. https://newspaperarchive.com/syracuse-post-standard-mar-28-1911-p-18/

Cabero, J. (1998). Impacto de las nuevas tecnologías de la información y la comunicación en las organizaciones educativas. En Lorenzo, M. et al. (Coords.), *Enfoques en la organización y dirección de instituciones educativas formales y no formales* (pp. 197-206). Grupo Editorial Universitario.

Cabrera, M. (2012). Qué son los nuevos medios y los medios sociales. En VV.AA., *Escribir en internet. Guía para los nuevos medios y las redes sociales* (pp. 1-20). Galaxia Gutenberg.

Cebrián, M. (2005). *Información multimedia: Soportes, lenguaje y aplicaciones empresariales.* Pearson Prentice Hall.

EFE. (2005, octubre 18). Una portada de Rolling Stone con Lennon y Yoko Ono es elegida en EEUU la mejor de los últimos 40 años. *El Mundo.* https://bit.ly/3AEs2kM

El País. (2013, octubre 19). Las claves de 'El País Semanal'. *El País.* https://bit.ly/3R3TPR2

Frascara, J. (2005). *Diseño gráfico y comunicación.* Infinito.

García-López, J. (2020). *La comunicación visual en la era digital: Técnicas y estrategias.* Editorial Informática.

García, M. (1993). *Contemporary Newspaper Design: A Structural Approach.* Prentice Hall.

González-Díez, L., & Pérez-Cuadrado, P. (2007). *30 años de diseño periodístico en España.* Zona Impresa.

Gràffica. (2022, noviembre 21). Muere George Lois, icónico publicista y diseñador de portadas. *Gràffica.* https://graffica.info/george-lois/

Kadushin, C. (2013). *Comprender las redes sociales: Teorías, conceptos y hallazgos.* Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas.

López-Sobejano, J. (2012). Redes sociales. En VV.AA., *Escribir en internet. Guía para los nuevos medios y las redes sociales* (pp. 21-40). Galaxia Gutenberg.

Mahon, N. (2010). *Dirección de arte: Publicidad.* Gustavo Gili.

Martínez-Pérez, A. (2019). *Titulares que conectan: Guía para optimizar la comunicación digital.* Digital Press.

McAleese, R. (1999). *Hypertext: Theory into practice.* Intellect.

Moen, D. (1995). *Newspaper Layout and Design.* Iowa State University Press.

Munari, B. (2016). *Diseño y comunicación visual.* Gustavo Gili.

Muñoz-Torres, C. (2022). Identidad visual editorial dinámica y diseño de portadas: El caso de las revistas culturales. *Revista de Comunicación, 21*(2), 251-268. https://revistadecomunicacion.com/article/view/2928/2513

Netflix. (2019). *Abstract: The art of design* [Serie documental]. En C. Niemann (Ilustrador). Episodio 1, Temporada 1. https://www.netflix.com

Pérez-Ramírez, L. (2023). *Diseño gráfico y cultura impresa: Un análisis de las portadas de libros.* Editorial LOM. https://lom.cl/blogs/blog/diseno-grafico-y-cultura-impresa-un-analisis-de-las-portadas-de-libros

Rodríguez-Sánchez, L. (2021). *Narrativas periodísticas en la web: Del lead al storytelling.* Editorial Multimedia.

Shecter, L. (1968, abril 1). La pasión de Muhammad Ali. *Esquire.* https://classic.esquire.com/article/1968/4/1/muhammad-ali

Tena, D. (2005). *Diseño gráfico y comunicación.* Pearson.

Viñas-Limonchi, M. (2013). *Paradigmas comunicativos en una era convulsa. Sobre una imagen y mil palabras.* Ediciones Universidad San Jorge.

Wasserman, S., & Faust, K. (2013). *Análisis de redes sociales: Métodos y aplicaciones.* Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas.

We Are Social. (2024). Digital 2024: Cinco billones de usuarios en social media. https://wearesocial.com/es/blog/2024/01/digital-2024-5-billiones-de-usuarios-en-social-media

Wheeler, A. (2021). *Designing Brand Identity: An Essential Guide for the Whole Branding Team* (5th ed.). Wiley.

Zappaterra, Y. (2008). *Diseño editorial: Periódicos y revistas.* Gustavo Gili.

Zorrilla, J. (2002). *Introducción al diseño periodístico.* EUNSA.