

Visual Identity in International Sports Communication: A Comparative Semiotic Study of Four Continental Football Club Logos

الهوية البصرية في الاتصال الرياضي الدولي: دراسة سيميولوجية مقارنة لشعارات أربعة أندية كروية قارية

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الملخص:

تبحث هذه الدراسة في دور الهوية البصرية داخل الاتصال الرياضي الدولي من خلال تحليل سيميولوجي لمقارن لأربعة شعارات لأندية كرة قدم من قارات مختلفة: ريال مدريد (أوروبا)، بوكا جونيورز (أمريكا الجنوبية)، الهلال (آسيا)، وشبيبة القبائل (إفريقيا). وبالاعتماد على نموذج رولان بارث في الدلالة والإيحاء، تحلل الدراسة كيفية اشتغال الشعار كنظام بصري يشفر معاني ثقافية ورمزية تتعلق بالهوية والسردية المؤسسية. اعتمد البحث منهجاً نوعياً تأويلياً لتحليل العناصر البصرية للشعارات—من ألوان وأشكال ورموز وخطوط—إلى جانب دلالاتها الثقافية والأيديولوجية. أظهرت النتائج أن كل شعار يعكس سياقه الثقافي والتاريخي الخاص؛ إذ يجسد شعار ريال مدريد رمزية السلطة الملكية والهيبة العالمية، بينما يعبر شعار بوكا جونيورز عن الهوية الشعبية والتراث العمالي. ويجمع شعار الهلال بين الرمزية العربية-الإسلامية والاحتراف الرياضي الحديث، في حين يبرز شعار شبيبة القبائل البعد الأمازيغي المرتبط بالمقاومة والانتماء للأرض والذاكرة الجماعية. وتوضح المقارنة أن الهوية البصرية في كرة القدم تُبنى وفق رموز ثقافية وإقليمية محددة، وتعمل كأداة لتعزيز الانتماء والتميز. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن شعارات الأندية ليست مجرد تصميمات جمالية، بل هي بنيات سيميائية تساهم في تشكيل الأساطير والهويات داخل الثقافة الرياضية العالمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهوية البصرية، الاتصال الرياضي، التحليل السيميولوجي، لوغو الأندية الكروية، التحليل المقارن.

Abstract:

This study explores the role of visual identity in international sports communication through a comparative semiotic analysis of four football club logos from distinct continents: Real Madrid (Europe), Boca Juniors (South America), Al Hilal (Asia), and JS Kabylie (Africa). Using Roland Barthes' model of denotation and connotation, the research examines how logos function as visual systems that convey cultural meanings, institutional narratives, and symbolic values. A qualitative interpretive methodology was employed to analyze visual elements such as shapes, colors, symbols, and typography, alongside their associated cultural and ideological connotations. The results reveal that each logo reflects a unique cultural and historical context. Real Madrid's crest expresses royal power and global prestige; Boca Juniors' emblem highlights community identity and working-class heritage; Al Hilal's logo combines Arab-Islamic symbolism with modern professionalism; while JS Kabylie's visual

identity foregrounds Amazigh cultural resistance and territorial belonging. The comparative analysis demonstrates that visual identity in football is shaped by cultural specificity and regional symbolism, functioning as a communicative tool that reinforces belonging and differentiation. Overall, the study shows that football logos are not merely aesthetic designs but semiotic structures that help construct the myths and identities of global sports culture. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of how visual identity operates within international sports communication.

Key words: Visual Identity ; Sports Communication ; Semiological Analysis ; Football Club Logos; Comparative Analysis.

Introduction:

In the evolving landscape of sports communication, visual identity has become a critical component in shaping meaning, constructing symbolic value, and fostering strong emotional connections between sports institutions and their audiences. Visual elements such as logos, colors, geometric forms, and typographic choices extend beyond mere aesthetic appeal; they operate as semiotic signs that express cultural narratives, institutional values, and the historical identity of football clubs¹. As global sports brands increasingly rely on visual symbolism to communicate with diverse publics, understanding the semiotic dimension of club logos has become essential for analyzing how identity is constructed and perceived across different contexts.²

While numerous studies have explored branding, marketing, and management strategies in sports³, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to the semiotic processes embedded in visual identity—particularly in a comparative, cross-cultural perspective. This gap becomes even more pronounced when considering how football clubs from different continents employ visual codes that reflect their cultural heritage, historical evolution, and communication strategies.⁴

To address this gap, the present study undertakes a comparative semiological analysis of four emblematic football club logos representing distinct geographical and cultural regions: Real Madrid (Europe), Boca Juniors (South America), Al Hilal (Asia), and JS Kabylie (Africa). These clubs were selected for the symbolic richness of their visual identities, their historical significance, and their strong influence within their respective regions. By examining how each logo conveys meaning through forms, colors, and symbols, the study aims to uncover both shared visual strategies and culturally specific semiotic constructions.

The central research question guiding this work is: **How do the visual identities of major football clubs from different continents function as semiotic systems within sports communication?**

The underlying hypothesis posits that football club logos are intentionally designed to encode symbolic values—such as power, heritage, community belonging, regional identity, or spiritual meaning—which enhance the effectiveness of their communication and global branding.⁵

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative semiotic approach grounded in Roland Barthes' model of denotation and connotation. This framework is applied to the four club logos to decode their explicit (denotative) visual components and their implicit (connotative) cultural meanings. Through this comparative lens, the analysis seeks to reveal how visual identity serves as a communicative apparatus that both reflects and constructs the symbolic universe of football on a global scale.

1. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in semiological analysis, with a particular focus on Roland Barthes' two-level model of meaning production—denotation and connotation. Given the symbolic nature of visual identity and the communicative functions of football club logos, a qualitative semiotic approach is the most suitable for uncovering both the explicit visual structures and the implicit cultural meanings embedded within these symbols.⁶

1.1 Research Approach

The research is based on a comparative qualitative design, aiming to examine how visual identity functions across different geographical and cultural contexts. Rather than relying on quantitative measurement or audience-based perception studies, the analysis prioritizes interpretation and meaning-making, consistent with semiotic tradition. This approach aligns with the idea that visual signs articulate identity, heritage, and institutional values within the global football landscape.⁷

1.2 Corpus of the Study

The empirical corpus consists of the official logos of four major football clubs, selected for their symbolic richness, historical significance, and strong cultural representation within their respective regions:

- Real Madrid (Europe)
- Boca Juniors (South America)
- Al Hilal (Asia)
- JS Kabylie – JSK (Africa)

These four cases provide a diverse and representative sample for examining how sports institutions employ visual identity to encode cultural and ideological meanings across continents⁸

1.3 Analytical Framework

The study employs Roland Barthes' semiological model, which distinguishes between:

- Denotation: the literal, descriptive level of meaning—shapes, colors, symbols, and composition.⁹
- Connotation: the cultural, ideological, and symbolic meanings associated with these elements, informed by history, identity, values, and collective memory.¹⁰

Using this model, each logo is analyzed individually to identify its denotative components and connotative interpretations. This stage is followed by a cross-case comparison to reveal shared symbolic structures as well as culturally specific practices of meaning-making.¹¹

1.4 Comparative Procedure

The comparative dimension of the methodology involves several structured steps, consistent with comparative semiotics:

- Individual semiotic analysis of each logo using Barthes' dual-level framework.
- Identification of symbolic themes emerging from color use, iconography, shapes, and typographic elements.
- Cross-case comparison to examine how each club visually constructs identity and how these identities diverge according to cultural, regional, and historical contexts.¹²
- Synthesis of findings to interpret the broader implications of visual identity in global sports communication.

1.5 Methodological Justification

A qualitative semiotic approach is justified as the study seeks to decode symbolic meaning—an analytical dimension that cannot be captured through quantitative tools. The comparative perspective enhances analytical depth by highlighting culturally specific visual codes as well as universal patterns of representation in sports communication, thereby aligning with global communication models emphasizing cultural variability and symbolic interpretation.¹³

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study establishes the conceptual foundations necessary for understanding how visual identity functions within international sports communication. Given that football club logos operate as symbolic constructions that convey cultural narratives, institutional values, and historical meanings, it is essential to ground the analysis in theories that explain the communicative and semiotic power of visual symbols. This section reviews the key theoretical perspectives that inform the study, beginning with the notion of visual identity as a strategic component of organizational communication and branding. It then examines the specific features of sports communication as a field where visual symbols play a central role in shaping fan loyalty, mediating cultural belonging, and constructing collective memory.

Furthermore, the framework draws on semiotic theory—particularly Roland Barthes' model of denotation and connotation—to explain how visual elements produce layered meanings that extend beyond their literal form. Because the study involves football clubs from four different continents, the theoretical discussion also highlights the cultural and historical significance of each club's visual identity, underscoring how logos serve not only as markers of institutional identity but also as reflections of broader social and cultural contexts. Together, these theoretical components provide the analytical lens through which the comparative semiotic analysis is conducted.

2.1 Visual Identity in Organizational Communication

Visual identity represents a fundamental dimension of organizational communication, serving as a strategic tool through which institutions construct and express their identity. It includes a coherent set of visual elements—such as colors, shapes, symbols, and typography—that work together to create a recognizable and meaningful representation of the organization.¹⁴ Contemporary communication theory emphasizes that visual identity functions not merely as a design feature but as a semiotic system that conveys values, cultural references, and institutional narratives.

In the context of sports organizations, visual identity becomes a powerful marker of belonging, differentiation, and symbolic influence. It enables supporters to recognize the club, connect emotionally with its history, and internalize the values it represents. Thus, visual identity serves both practical and symbolic functions, bridging the gap between the institution and its public.¹⁵

2.2 Sports Communication and Symbolic Representation

Sports communication has evolved significantly in recent decades, driven by globalization, media exposure, and the rise of digital platforms. Today, football clubs operate not only as athletic entities but also as brands that engage in complex communication strategies aimed at strengthening visibility, identity, and fan loyalty.¹⁶

Within this context, visual communication plays a central role. The symbols, emblems, and visual codes employed by sports clubs are deeply intertwined with their storytelling strategies. They express tradition, achievements, geographic roots, and collective identity. Research in sports communication emphasizes that visual signs help construct a narrative that transcends the sport itself, shaping how clubs are perceived regionally and globally.¹⁷ Analyzing visual identity in sports therefore reveals how clubs communicate who they are, what they stand for, and how they differentiate themselves within a highly competitive global environment.

2.3 The Logo as a Semiotic and Communicative System

The logo represents the core element of visual identity. It condenses a club's symbolic universe into a single visual unit, functioning simultaneously as an identifier, a cultural marker, and a communicative device. From a semiotic perspective, logos operate through:

- Denotation: the explicit, visible elements such as color, shape, icons, and textual markings.
- Connotation: the cultural and emotional meanings associated with these elements, including heritage, power, spirituality, regional belonging, and collective memory.

In sports branding, the logo becomes a strategic artefact capable of generating identification and reinforcing loyalty. Its design is almost always intentional, drawing from historical roots, sociocultural codes, and strategic branding goals. Whether through regal symbols (as in European clubs), cultural motifs (as in African or Asian teams), or community-based colors (as in South American clubs), each logo represents a layered system of meanings that extends beyond its visual surface. Thus, semiological analysis enables the decoding of these layered

meanings, revealing how visual elements contribute to constructing the club's identity and communicative power.¹⁸

2.4 Cultural and Historical Significance of the Selected Football Clubs

The four clubs selected for this study—Real Madrid, Boca Juniors, Al Hilal, and JS Kabylie—offer distinct cultural, historical, and symbolic contexts, making them ideal for comparative semiotic analysis.

- **Real Madrid (Europe).**

Founded in 1902, Real Madrid is internationally recognized as a symbol of excellence, prestige, and elite football culture. Its identity is heavily tied to royal symbolism, tradition, and global influence, with the club's crest integrating regal elements that project authority and heritage.¹⁹

- **Boca Juniors (South America).**

Based in Buenos Aires and founded in 1905, Boca Juniors embodies the cultural and emotional spirit of Argentine popular football. Its visual identity draws from maritime symbolism and the working-class heritage of the La Boca neighborhood, with the colors and stars representing community pride and historical achievements.²⁰

- **Al Hilal (Asia).**

Established in 1957 in Saudi Arabia, Al Hilal is one of Asia's most accomplished clubs. Its logo incorporates the crescent—a deeply rooted cultural and symbolic element in Arab and Islamic identity—along with the iconic blue color that has become central to the club's visual universe.²¹

- **JS Kabylie – JSK (Africa).**

Founded in 1946 and rooted in Kabyle and Amazigh cultural identity, JSK is among Africa's most decorated teams. Its crest integrates Amazigh symbols and regional colors (yellow and green), reflecting cultural heritage, territorial identity, and a strong sense of belonging.²²

3. Comparative Semiotic Analysis of Football Club Logos (Barthes' Denotation–Connotation Model)

This section presents a comparative semiotic analysis of the four selected football club logos, applying Roland Barthes' dual model of denotation and connotation. While each logo has been examined individually to uncover its explicit visual components and its implicit cultural meanings, a comparative approach allows for the identification of shared symbolic patterns as well as culturally specific visual codes. By placing the logos of Real Madrid, Boca Juniors, Al Hilal, and JS Kabylie within a unified analytical framework, this section highlights how visual identity in football is shaped by regional histories, cultural narratives, and institutional values. The comparative reading not only reveals the distinct semiotic strategies used by clubs across continents but also demonstrates how visual symbols function

as communicative tools that articulate identity and reinforce the club's position within the global sports landscape.

3.1 Semiotic Analysis of Real Madrid's Logo

Shape N°1: Real Madrid's Logo



Source: www.realmadrid.com

Table 1. Semiotic Analysis of Real Madrid's Logo (Denotation–Connotation)

Level	Denotation (Visible Elements)	Connotation (Symbolic Meaning)
Colors	White, dark blue, gold, red	White: purity, prestige; Blue: authority, stability; Gold: excellence, glory; Red: royal symbolism
Symbols	Royal crown on top of the crest	Legitimacy, heritage, sovereignty, elite status
Letters MCF	Initials of <i>Madrid Club de Fútbol</i>	Institutional identity, authenticity, origin
Circle	A closed circular shape	Unity, continuity, global expansion
Diagonal stripe	Blue band cutting across the crest	Dynamism, movement, evolution
Crown design	Five-arched gold crown with red ornaments	Power, monarchy, historical endorsement
Overall composition	Hierarchical structure with crown above core identity	Visual hierarchy representing authority and tradition

Source: Table developed by the researcher based on Barthes' semiotic model.

The logo of Real Madrid operates as a dense semiotic construct that unifies visual form with cultural narrative, projecting the club's identity through both denotative and connotative layers of meaning—a process central to Barthes' semiotic theory²³. At the denotative level, the emblem consists of a circular crest containing the intertwined initials *MCF*, crossed diagonally by a blue stripe, and topped by an ornate golden crown accented with red. These elements form a structured composition where typography, geometry, and symbolic motifs coexist within a harmonious visual system, reflecting core principles of visual identity design²⁴. Beyond this literal surface, the logo's connotative force emerges through deeply embedded cultural and historical associations. The royal crown, granted by King Alfonso XIII, evokes notions of sovereignty, legitimacy, and elite status, elevating the club from a mere sporting institution to a symbol of aristocratic heritage and excellence. The circular form suggests unity, completeness, and global reach, reinforcing Real Madrid's self-image as a universal brand with a presence that transcends national borders—a hallmark of sports globalization. The gold color signifies glory, victory, and institutional prestige, while the deep blue hue conveys authority, stability, and disciplined strength, echoing findings in color semiotics and brand symbolism. The diagonal stripe introduces a sense of movement and modernity, symbolizing the club's capacity for evolution and continuity across generations. Even the intertwined initials anchor the logo in its historical origins, communicating authenticity and rootedness in the city of Madrid. Taken together, these visual codes construct a mythic identity in the Barthesian sense—an image of Real Madrid as a timeless, dominant, and globally recognized symbol of power, tradition, and sporting superiority.²⁵

3.2 Semiotic Analysis of Boca Juniors' Logo

Shape N°2: Boca Juniors' Logo



Source : <https://www.bocajuniors.com.ar/>

Table 2. Semiotic Analysis of Boca Juniors' Logo (Denotation–Connotation)

Level	Denotation (Visible Elements)	Connotation (Symbolic Meaning)
Colors	Deep blue background with a yellow horizontal band	Maritime origin; working-class identity; community pride
Shape	Shield-like emblem	Protection, struggle, collective defense
Initials CABJ	Bold yellow letters	Institutional identity; historical continuity
Stars	Numerous yellow stars around the shield	Achievements, collective memory, glory
Composition	Symmetrical layout with central	Unity, balance, territorial rootedness

band

Source: Table developed by the researcher based on Barthes' semiotic model.

The logo of Boca Juniors functions as a potent semiotic artifact that encapsulates the cultural identity, historical memory, and communal spirit of one of South America's most emblematic football clubs. Denotatively, the emblem features a shield-shaped form filled with a deep blue background intersected by a thick yellow horizontal band, inside which the club's initials *CABJ* appear in bold lettering. The shield is also decorated with numerous yellow stars arranged in a patterned field across the upper and lower sections, forming a composition that aligns with principles of visual identity and brand symbolism. Although visually straightforward, this emblem acquires rich connotative significance when interpreted through the lens of Barthes' semiology.²⁶

The blue and yellow color palette—famously chosen based on the flag of a passing Swedish ship in the early 20th century—connotes a maritime heritage intertwined with the working-class identity of the La Boca neighborhood, suggesting resilience, pride, and a strong sense of community belonging²⁷. The shield form evokes ideas of protection, struggle, and collective defense, reflecting the club's reputation as a symbol of popular resistance and identity within Argentine football culture²⁸. The yellow band not only provides visual balance but also symbolizes unity and territorial rootedness, linking the club to its geographic and cultural origins. The stars serve as connotative markers of achievement and institutional memory, transforming sporting victories into visual tokens of collective glory—a technique consistent with semiotic practices in sports branding²⁹. Meanwhile, the bold *CABJ* initials reinforce the club's institutional authority while functioning as a cultural shorthand widely recognized across generations of supporters.

Taken together, the visual vocabulary of Boca Juniors' logo constructs a myth of identity centered on passion, community solidarity, and the enduring spirit of the working classes—an identity that positions the club not merely as a sporting institution but as a cultural symbol deeply embedded in the social fabric of Buenos Aires and Latin American football culture.³⁰

3.3 Semiotic Analysis of Al Hilal's Logo

Shape N°3: Al Hilal's Logo



Source : <https://alhilal.com/en>

Table 3. Semiotic Analysis of Al Hilal's Logo (Denotation–Connotation)

Level	Denotation (Visible Elements)	Connotation (Symbolic Meaning)
Colors	Blue and white	Blue: trust, depth, calm strength; White: purity, clarity
Main Symbol	Crescent moon (Hilal)	Cultural identity, Islamic symbolism, renewal, guidance
Secondary Symbol	Football next to the crescent	Sporting identity, global universality of football
Shape	Shield emblem	Strength, protection, competitive resilience
Typography	“AL HILAL” written in capital letters	Institutional authority, modern professionalism
Date (1957)	Founding year	Historical continuity, legacy, rootedness
Overall Structure	Central alignment of symbols within shield	Unity, balance, institutional coherence

Source: Table developed by the researcher based on Barthes’ semiotic model.

The logo of Al Hilal Saudi Football Club operates as a layered semiotic construct that communicates the club’s cultural identity, institutional heritage, and athletic mission through a combination of symbolic forms and color codes. Denotatively, the emblem appears in a shield shape dominated by blue and white tones, featuring a crescent moon placed beside a football, accompanied by the club’s name and founding date, 1957. These visual elements, though simple in appearance, acquire substantial connotative depth when interpreted through the semiological lens outlined by Barthes’ model of denotation and connotation. The blue color—central to Al Hilal’s identity—embodies trust, stability, and composed strength, while the white accents convey purity, clarity, and the aspirational dimension of the club’s ethos.

These interpretations align with established theories on color symbolism and brand communication in visual identity studies.³¹

The crescent moon functions as the core symbolic feature of the logo, resonating deeply with Arab-Islamic cultural heritage and evoking connotations of renewal, guidance, and spiritual continuity³². Its presence anchors the club within a broader cultural and regional framework that transcends sports, transforming the emblem into an icon recognizable across the Middle East. The football symbol situates the logo within the global athletic domain, visually articulating the club’s commitment to modern professionalism and international competition, consistent with contemporary sport-branding practices.³³

The shield shape reinforces ideas of protection, competitive resilience, and institutional solidity, a visual convention widely used in sports logos to signal strength and unity. Meanwhile, the straightforward typography of “AL HILAL” in capital letters emphasizes formality, authority, and institutional clarity. The inclusion of the founding year, 1957, strengthens the logo’s historical dimension, grounding it in a legacy that extends over six decades and connecting past achievements with present identity—a strategy frequently observed in clubs seeking to emphasize tradition.

Taken together, these elements construct a coherent myth of identity in the Barthesian sense, in which Al Hilal appears as a club that merges cultural authenticity with sporting

excellence. The logo thus positions the club's visual identity as a bridge between tradition, modernity, and regional pride, reflecting the broader communicative functions of visual identity within Middle Eastern sports culture.³⁴

3.4 Semiotic Analysis of JS Kabylie (JSK)'s Logo

Shape N°3: JS Kabylie (JSK)'s Logo



Source :<https://jskabylielclub.com/>

Table 4. Semiotic Analysis of JS Kabylie's Logo (Denotation–Connotation)

Dimension	Real Madrid (Europe)	Boca Juniors (South America)	Al Hilal (Asia)	JS Kabylie – JSK (Africa)
Main Colors	White, blue, gold, red	Blue, yellow	Blue, white	Yellow, green
Color Connotation	Royalty, prestige, authority	Working-class identity, energy, community pride	Trust, cultural depth, clarity	Amazigh identity, vitality, land/nature
Primary Symbol	Royal crown	Shield + stars	Crescent moon	Amazigh letter “ⵣ”
Symbolic Meaning	Monarchy, legitimacy, global elite	Popular identity, achievements, collective memory	Cultural authenticity, renewal, regional pride	Cultural resistance, heritage, identity
Shape	Circular emblem	Shield	Shield	Circular/elliptical
Shape Connotation	Unity, global reach, continuity	Protection, struggle, belonging	Strength, institutional solidity	Community cohesion, continuity
Textual Elements	MCF initials	CABJ initials	AL HILAL (capital letters)	JSK initials
Historical Marker	Royal patronage	Neighborhood/popular culture	Year 1957	Year 1946
Visual Strategy	Elite, hierarchical, formal	Popular, emotional, achievement-centered	Modern, culturally grounded	Cultural-symbolic, identity-centered
Overall Identity	Power, prestige,	Community, passion, social authenticity	Tradition blended with	Cultural pride, resilience, regional

Myth	superiority		modernity	identity
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Source: Table developed by the researcher based on Barthes' semiotic model.

The logo of JS Kabylie functions as a deeply culturally embedded semiotic structure that reflects the club's Amazigh identity, regional history, and collective ethos. Denotatively, the emblem appears in a circular or slightly elliptical form dominated by the colors yellow and green, with the Amazigh letter “ⵣ” placed prominently at the center, accompanied by the club's initials *JSK* and the founding year, 1946. Decorative shapes or dots often frame the central symbol, contributing to the visual distinctiveness of the crest, in line with traditional Amazigh artistic forms. On the connotative level, these elements convey a rich cultural narrative rooted in Kabyle and Amazigh heritage. The central “ⵣ” symbol—known as Yaz—carries strong associations with cultural endurance, freedom, and resistance, functioning as a core emblem of Amazigh identity across North Africa. Its placement at the heart of the logo transforms the crest into a visual declaration of identity that transcends its sporting function.³⁵

The yellow color connotes vitality, energy, and cultural brightness, reflecting symbolic traditions often linked to Amazigh cosmology and art. Meanwhile, the green evokes the natural landscape of Kabylie and symbolizes connection to land, continuity, and harmony—values deeply rooted in Amazigh cultural representation. The circular shape reinforces notions of unity and collective solidarity, aligning with the club's reputation as a symbol of regional pride and communal belonging within Algerian football. The inclusion of the founding year situates the club historically within the broader context of the anti-colonial period, granting the logo a dimension of historical depth and legitimacy. The initials *JSK* add institutional clarity and reinforce the club's longstanding presence in both Algerian and African football history.³⁶

Altogether, the logo constructs a powerful semiotic identity that merges cultural authenticity, historical resonance, and community strength, positioning *JSK* not merely as a football team but as a cultural emblem deeply embedded in the Amazigh social fabric. This aligns with Barthes' conception of myth as a cultural narrative encoded within visual signs, highlighting how sports symbols can articulate identity and resistance within broader sociopolitical contexts.³⁷

4. Discussion

The findings of this comparative semiological analysis provide significant insights into how visual identity functions as a communicative system within global football culture, thereby addressing the central question raised in the introduction: How do the visual identities of major football clubs from different continents operate as semiotic systems within sports communication? Through examining the logos of Real Madrid, Boca Juniors, Al Hilal, and JS Kabylie, the study demonstrates that visual identity is not merely a matter of aesthetic design but a structured symbolic code that conveys cultural values, institutional narratives, and socio-historical meanings—a view consistent with semiotic theory. This directly reinforces the theoretical framework in which visual identity was conceptualized as a semiotic apparatus capable of articulating organizational image and shaping audience perception.

The comparative analysis shows that each logo encodes meaning according to its cultural, historical, and geographical context, illustrating the theoretical premise that visual signs acquire significance not only from their design elements but from the social myths and ideological structures that surround them. Real Madrid's emblem, with its royal crown and hierarchical composition, exemplifies how European football clubs often anchor their identity in notions of prestige, authority, and historical legitimacy—an interpretation consistent with Barthesian connotation, where a sign transcends its literal form to construct a mythology of power³⁸. Boca Juniors stands in contrast, reflecting a popular, working-class identity rooted in the La Boca neighborhood, where the shield shape, color palette, and star motifs collectively form a visual narrative of community, resilience, and collective achievement. This supports the argument in the theoretical framework that visual identity in sports often operates as a tool of social cohesion and emotional belonging.³⁹

Similarly, the logo of Al Hilal highlights the intersection between visual identity and cultural specificity. The crescent moon—an iconic Arab-Islamic symbol—reveals how the club's brand identity is shaped by regional cultural codes, aligning with the theoretical notion that visual signs are culturally situated. The combination of modern graphic design with deeply rooted traditional symbolism suggests a strategic communication approach that positions the club as both globally competitive and locally rooted, consistent with contemporary scholarship on sports branding. JS Kabylie's emblem further extends this cultural dimension through its explicit use of the Amazigh letter “ⵣ,” which signifies heritage, resistance, and ethnic pride. This confirms that visual identity can serve as a vehicle for cultural assertion and collective memory—reflecting the theoretical perspective that symbols in sports communication are not neutral but ideologically charged.

Taken together, the four logos affirm that visual identity in sports communication is fundamentally relational and context-dependent. While all emblems serve the universal function of institutional representation, each constructs a different symbolic universe: Real Madrid projects a myth of aristocratic power; Boca Juniors embodies community solidarity; Al Hilal synthesizes cultural tradition with modern professionalism; and JSK foregrounds ethnic-cultural resilience. These distinctions validate the study's hypothesis that football logos intentionally encode symbolic values that shape public perception and reinforce the communicative strategies of the clubs.

Ultimately, the discussion demonstrates that visual identity functions not only as a design element but as a semiotic narrative that communicates who the club is, what it represents, and how it positions itself within a global sporting landscape. By linking the empirical findings to the theoretical framework and research problem, this section underscores the broader argument of the study: that football logos are powerful socio-cultural texts that reflect—and help construct—the myths, identities, and symbolic hierarchies of contemporary sports culture.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore how visual identity operates as a semiotic system within sports communication by examining and comparing the logos of four culturally and

geographically distinct football clubs: Real Madrid, Boca Juniors, Al Hilal, and JS Kabylie. Through Roland Barthes' model of denotation and connotation, the analysis revealed that each emblem functions not only as an identifier but also as a symbolic narrative that conveys cultural values, historical depth, and institutional ideology. The findings confirmed the initial hypothesis that football logos are intentionally designed to encode layered symbolic meanings that shape the communicative power and public image of sports institutions.

Across the comparative analysis, the study demonstrated that the visual identity of each club reflects the socio-cultural and historical context from which it emerges. Real Madrid's crest constructs a myth of royal authority and elite prestige, Boca Juniors' emblem embodies community pride and popular identity, Al Hilal's logo articulates cultural authenticity rooted in Arab-Islamic symbolism, and JSK's badge serves as a cultural declaration of Amazigh heritage and collective resilience. These differences highlight the central theoretical insight that visual identity is inherently context-dependent: it acquires meaning through the cultural codes, ideological structures, and historical narratives embedded within its design.

The results also underscore the broader argument advanced in the theoretical framework—that sports logos transcend aesthetic functions to become communicative tools capable of shaping emotional attachment, institutional legitimacy, and symbolic power. By linking visual form to cultural meaning, the study provides evidence that football logos act as semiotic texts that construct myths, reinforce collective identities, and position clubs within global, regional, or local hierarchies.

Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of visual identity in sports communication by demonstrating that logos are not neutral or decorative elements but strategic visual narratives that reflect and shape the symbolic universe of football culture. Future research may extend this comparative approach by examining fan interpretations, media representations, or the evolution of logos over time. Such studies would further enrich our understanding of how visual identity influences perception, loyalty, and cultural belonging within the global sports arena.

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