The logo is a key part of a brand’s visual identity. Logos appear on letterhead, business cards, annual reports, package and product designs, print and TV advertisements, websites and smartphone applications. As a result, logos have become an important way to capture awareness and build brand image. This study investigates how logo design impacts brand perception. More specifically, we explore how a logo’s textual content interacts with its graphic design to deliver a specific message. Semiotic theory provides the framework to study this question. Two logos with the same textual content but different designs are analyzed, first through a semiotic study and then with an experiment involving 903 survey respondents. The results confirm that the textual content of the logos interacts with the visual aspect in what we have termed the double anchorage effect.

keywords: graphic design; typography; semiotics; marketing

Introduction
The logo is part of a brand’s visual expression. It communicates messages to the brand’s audience through its textual content (i.e., the brand name it displays) and visual aspect (i.e., its graphic design).

Many academic studies have highlighted the importance of logos in brand communication, showing that logo designs have a powerful impact on brand image and that a change in the design will change the brand perception (Henderson & Cote, 1998; Henderson et al., 2003; Hagtvedt, 2011; Cian et al., 2014). Through the graphic and stylistic choices that have been made, logos communicate different brand identities and positionings.
Several studies have sought to understand how this occurs in order to build a theoretical framework and principles to guide managers in defining the optimal visual aspect of their logo based on the message they want to communicate. More specifically, these studies have tried to identify the logo variables that can be manipulated to communicate specific messages to consumers. Some have adopted an analytical approach, examining how “low order” variables like color or typeface independently impact brand perception. Others have taken a holistic approach, exploring how “high order” variables like the overall complexity of the design impact brand perception. (Orth & Malkewitz, 2008).

The two approaches are complementary and have significantly contributed to a better understanding of the question. However, most of these studies have tended to focus strictly on the visual aspect of the logos without considering the interaction with the textual content. Yet, brands commonly choose highly evocative names. These names may suggest the brand’s sector of activity (e.g., Easyjet), its alleged country of origin (e.g., Desperados) or the functional (e.g., Everlast), emotional (e.g., Innocent) or symbolic (e.g., Desigual) benefits the brand promises its consumers. Once the name is chosen, a logo’s design will then make sense by echoing the brand name. Moreover, the meaning of a logo’s visual attribute can change according to its textual content. For instance, the meaning of green in a logo is not likely to be same if the brand’s name is “Poison” (like the Christian Dior perfume) as opposed to “Greenpeace” (like the NGO).

This article aims to fill a gap in the literature by investigating how the interactions between a logo’s graphic design and textual content determine the messages that are communicated to the brand audience and modify brand perception. A review of the literature on semiotics, visual art and marketing provides the theoretical framework for this work, and a proposition is formulated. Then, two logos presenting the same textual content but different graphic designs are analyzed from a semiotic perspective and then tested in two groups of respondents (N=903). The research objective is twofold: to verify the proposition issued from the literature and to determine whether semiotic tools can predict how the two logo designs are likely to generate specific associations of ideas and thereby impact brand perception.

Conceptual and theoretical background

A semiotic approach to logos

Logos are visual signs and semiotics can be quickly defined as “the science of signs” or “the theory and study that describe signs and the mechanisms by means of which a sign system produces meaning” (Kehret-Ward, 1988; Ares et al., 2011). It therefore appears logical to consider the semiotics literature to understand how logos produce meanings about the brands they represent.

The field of semiotics grew out of the pioneering work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (Glen Mick, 1986; Crow, 2010).

Saussure argues that signs can be divided into two facets: the “signifier” and the “signified” (Saussure, 1916). The “signifier” is usually defined as the physical manifestation of the sign. It is something we perceive through our senses – that is, something which can be seen, heard, touched, smelled or tasted. It can be a sound (for a verbal sign) or an
image (for a visual sign). The “signified” is defined as the meaning that is attached to the signifier (Chandler, 2007). Signifiers form the “expression plan” of signs while signifieds form the “content plan” (Barthes, 1964a).

Peirce introduced the concept of “semiosis.” Semiosis can be defined as “the relationship associating a signifier with a signified” (Chandler, 2007). The concept of semiosis allowed Peirce to distinguish different types of signs called “symbols,” “index” and “icons. These types of signs differ according to the “mode of relationship” between the signifier and the signified. Building on Peirce’s typology of semioses (Peirce, 1931-1958) and on Barthes’s (1964b) research on visual rhetoric, Cavassilas (2007) proposed that four kinds of semioses can be used to describe how packages or logo graphic design communicate meanings to consumers:

- **Symbolic semiosis** refers to the situation in which the signifier is arbitrarily connected to the signified. The association is purely conventional and culturally dependent. In other words, there is no objective characteristic of the signifier that allows an outsider to understand why, within a given society, it has been associated with a specific signified. Verbal signs (i.e., words) are usually cases of symbols as they need to be learned to be understood.

- **Indexical semiosis** refers to the situation in which the signifier is connected to the signified by a link of continuity or causality. For example, the use of green in the Greenpeace logo is a case of indexical semiosis because green is a common color for vegetals and nature. It’s therefore logical to use it as a signifier to suggest an organization that seeks to protect the environment.

- **Iconic semiosis** refers to the situation in which the signifier is connected to the signified by resemblance. For example, the use of a basketball player’s silhouette in the NBA logo is a case of iconic semiosis because the signifier “basketball player’s silhouette” looks like the object that it is supposed to mean (i.e., a real player).

- **Finally, metaphoric semiosis** refers to the situation in which the signifier is not to be interpreted “literally” but is used to refer to one of its qualities/properties. For example, the drawing of a massive red bull in the Chicago Bulls logo is a case of metaphoric semiosis. Of course, the drawing doesn’t mean “literally” that the players are bulls but that they are as combative or powerful as bulls.

These concepts have been widely used to analyze how companies communicate explicit and implicit messages to their consumers through their different communications materials (Floch, 2003, 2010; Cavassilas, 2007; Ares et al., 2011; Gollety & Guichard, 2011; Piqueras-Fiszman et al., 2011; see also Hetzel & Marion, 1993, or Mick et al., 2004, for extensive literature reviews on the topic). They provide a relevant framework for analyzing how logos produce meanings. Thus, from a semiotic perspective, it can be said that a logo is part of a brand’s expression plan. It is a combination of several signifiers (e.g., its textual content, colors, typography, imagery, and overall form) that communicate specific signifieds (i.e., meanings) to the brand’s audience through different types of semiosis. These signifieds are part of the brand’s content plan and are usually relative to the brand’s identity – that is, its values, promise, and points of difference.
**Logo textual and visual content**

From this perspective, typography is thus one of the visual signifiers that logos employ to communicate messages to their consumers. However, typography is different from other visual signifiers (colors, imagery, etc.) as typography is “the visual transcription of verbal signs” (i.e., words) (Drucker, 1994). Therefore, typography is a signifier that is simultaneously word and image and carries textual as well as visual content.

Based on this observation and Barthes’s works (1964a, 1964b), typographer Blanchard (1980, 1998) suggests that typography communicates two levels of meaning. The first level is the literal and explicit meaning of the word that is written. The second level is the meaning induced by the visual aspect of this word (i.e., its typography). Thus, the same word, depending on whether it is written in Times or Mistral, bold or thin, and italic or roman letters, will produce the same meanings according to its textual content but different meanings according to its typography (cf. Figure 1). This assumption has been empirically verified by several marketing studies that have demonstrated that the visual aspect of typography has an impact on consumer perception of brands and products (Childers & Jass, 2002; Doyle & Bottomley, 2004, 2006; Hagtvedt, 2011; Henderson et al., 2004; Van Rompay & Pruyn, 2011; Velasco et al., 2014).

![Figure 1  Same textual content, but different visual meanings.](image)

If we apply this idea to logos, it can be argued that logos are visual signifiers that carry two levels of meanings as well. The first level of meaning is produced by the logo textual content, which most of the time is the brand’s name. The second level of meaning is produced by the logo visual aspect – its typography as well as its colors or other visual attributes.

**A double anchorage effect**

The distinction between these two levels of meaning (the meaning produced by the textual content and the meaning produced by the visual aspect) helps to explain how communications materials combining text and image generate meanings.

In Rhetoric of the Image (1964b), Roland Barthes observes that print advertising is almost always composed of an image accompanied by text. According to Barthes the image carries an “iconic message” while the text carries a “linguistic message.” This latter serves to “anchor” the iconic message (the image) because, still according to Barthes, all images are polysemous and open to subjective interpretation. Barthes points out that the addition of a linguistic message guides the interpretation of the image in the direction intended by the advertiser and therefore fulfills a function of “anchorage”:

*The text directs the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others; by means of an often subtle dispatching,*
It remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance (Barthes, 1964b).

This idea applies quite clearly to logos: a logo’s first level of meaning, which is produced by its textual content, is what Barthes calls a “linguistic message.” The second level of meaning, which is produced by its visual aspect, is similar to what Barthes calls the “iconic message.” As for print advertisement, the textual content of logos can be used to guide the interpretation of their visual aspect (i.e., their graphic design). Figure 2 illustrate this idea. The typeface presented is an exotype called “Kremlin Premier.” Its design is supposed to suggest the Cyrillic alphabet and the Russian culture. When the textual content is neutral (example on the left) the meaning of the typeface design is uncertain and only a few connoisseurs in typography may understand it. However, when the textual content fulfills a function of anchorage (example on the right) the meaning produced by the visual aspect of the typeface is more likely to be understood by a large audience (Celhay et al., 2015). Therefore, it can be argued that for logos as well as for print advertisement the textual content fulfills a function of anchorage regarding the meaning of the logo’s visual aspect.

Типографня  Russian Υόδκα

Figure 2  The textual content “anchors” the meaning of the logo design.

Yet these observations merit further development because, just as an image is polysemous, a word can have several meanings. This is notably so when it appears in isolation from all other textual content, as is often the case with logos. Another example is when the meaning of the brand name is implicit (e.g., Innocent, Bonne Maman) and not explicit (e.g., Easyjet, Duracell). In such cases, it seems that the visual aspect of the logo, especially the typography, can activate one meaning rather than another. We therefore hypothesize an effect of “double anchorage”: the meaning of the logo’s visual aspect is anchored by the meaning of its textual content AND the meaning of the logo’s textual content is anchored by the meaning of its visual aspect. To illustrate this, let us take the word “care.” On its own, this word has many meanings. It can signal an alert, a concern, or the act of a looking after someone. In this situation, the typographic choices (font, boldness, uppercase letters) will activate one meaning over others. For example, when “care” is in uppercase letters with a bold stencil typeface, it is more likely to activate the meaning of an alert (see Figure 3, left). Yet when the same word appears in lowercase lettering with a delicate formal script, it will probably activate a gentler meaning like the fact of caring for someone (Figure 3, right).

CARE  Care

Figure 3  The logo design “anchors” the meaning of the textual content.
Therefore, we propose that the anchorage effect first described by Barthes is not unilateral but bilateral. Especially in the case of logos, it is likely that the visual aspect guides the interpretation of the textual content, just as much as the meaning of the textual content guides the interpretation of the visual aspect. In the following sections, we test this proposition by studying two logos presenting the same textual content but two different visual aspects.

**Methods**

To test our proposal, we studied the perceptions of the old and new logos of the Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization (NGO), long known simply as CARE (Figure 4).

![Figure 4](image)

*The logos analyzed and tested in the study.*

We performed a semiotic analysis of the two logos and then conducted an experiment with 903 survey respondents to determine their perceptions. In the following sections, we explain our choice of stimuli and then present our methodology for the semiotic analysis and the experiment.

**Choice of the stimuli**

CARE is one of the oldest nonprofit NGOs dedicated to providing disaster relief and fighting poverty worldwide. According to Kasturi Rangan and Lee (2012), CARE employed more than 12,000 people in 2007, was present in 71 countries, and had a budget of 545 million dollars for its various programs. Despite its importance, the American NGO has a relatively weak brand awareness (Rieunier, 2008), which is one of the main reasons for choosing these logos for our study: It was relatively easy to find “naïve” respondents – that is, without prior knowledge of CARE, its positioning and its activities.

Also, CARE underwent a reorientation in 2007. The brand’s positioning was redefined and a new logo was adopted to signal this change (Kasturi Rangan & Lee, 2012). The new logo has the same textual content as the original (i.e., the word CARE) but a different visual aspect (Figure 4). This case study thus gave us two realistic stimuli (being real) and was nicely adapted for an experiment to study how a logo’s graphic design impacts the perception of a brand.
These two logos had one further advantage with regard to our objective. Each proposes a
different visual retranscription of the polysemous word “care.” The choice of these two
logos thus allowed us to study our proposition regarding the existence of a double
anchorage effect. Our idea was to investigate the extent to which the meanings expressed
by the visual aspect of each logo would activate one of the meanings of the word “care”
rather than the others.

Semiotic analysis of the two logos
In this first step, we conducted a semiotic study of the two logos. We expected this first
study to provide insights into the probable interactions between the textual content and
visual aspect of each logo.

We used a text-interpretive approach in the Saussurean/structuralist tradition
of semiotics (Chandler, 2007). More specifically, we adopted the methodological approach
proposed by Cavassilas (2007), which consists of decomposing the logo expression plan
into its various signifiers and then studying how each of them individually and
synergistically contributes to create specific meanings (i.e., signifieds) about the brand.
The value of this approach is that each interpretation is based on the above-presented
typology of semioses, as well as on an extensive review of the literature in the visual arts,
art history and graphic design. As each interpretation is qualified according to the kinds of
semiosis, the transparency of the analysis is ensured and readers are able to grasp the
relevance of the interpretation. By basing the interpretations on the visual arts literature,
Cavassilas further ensures that the interpretation is not subjective but is instead in line
with the conventions and well-known rules that artists and graphic designers use to
express themselves in a visual way. This is an important point because, as Chandler (2007)
reminds us, “social conventions ensure that signs cannot mean whatever an individual
wants them to mean” and prevent the reader (and the analyst) from what Eco (1965) calls
“aberrant decodings.”

Regarding this issue, it should be noted that even though we have qualified our
methodology as “text interpretive,” there is little room for subjectivity. Indeed,
semioticians such as Hall (1973) remind us that media texts vary in the extent to which
they are open to interpretation and that some codes are more widespread and accessible
than others. This observation led Fiske (1982) and Bernstein (1971) to make a distinction
between “broadcast and restricted codes,” which are shared by the members of a mass
audience and are structurally simpler and more repetitive, and “narrowcast and
elaborated codes,” which are aimed at a more limited audience and are more complex
and less redundant. Eco (1981) considers mass media texts as belonging to the first
category and describes them as “closed texts” – that is, texts that are not open to
subjective interpretation. Logos fall into this category as they occur in a commercial
context and are used by brands as mass media. This means that it is not difficult to analyze
their meanings compared with the meanings of other visual artifacts such as artistic ones.
Brands conceive their logos to be understood by the greatest number.

After this decoding, another methodological precaution was to triangulate the data to
check whether our interpretation of the two logos was congruent with the intended
communication from CARE and its change in positioning as presented in the case study of
Kasturi Rangan and Lee (2012).
**Analysis of the perceptions of the two logos**

In the second step, we conducted an inter-subject experiment to study the perception of the two logos. Each respondent was randomly shown one of the logos. Data were collected via an online questionnaire using the Qualtrics platform. Filter questions at the beginning of the questionnaire allowed us to exclude respondents who had a previous knowledge of CARE or who had already seen the logo they were presented with. Our final sample was composed of 903 respondents (48.7% male; Mage = 27 years), 486 who were shown logo 1 and 417 who were shown logo 2.

To evaluate the perceptions of the two logos and their impact on the CARE image, we used a free word association task (Ares et al., 2011) and the nonprofit brand image scale developed by Michel and Rieunier (2013) for humanitarian organizations. The responses to the word association task underwent lexical content analysis using Sphinx Quali software. Last, the scores for each logo on the brand image scale were compared by ANOVA.

**Results**

**Semiotic analysis**

Logo 1 used the signifier “care” presented in uppercase letters with a stencil typeface. The font is thick and rectangular. The colors are green and white, and the green shade is a cold one. There are no illustrations except for two very thick and rectangular horizontal lines framing the word “care.” These two lines reinforce the rectangular aspect of the logo. The contours of the different parts of the logo are regular and there is no texture effect.

Logo 2 uses the same signifier “care” but the word is in lowercase letters and the typeface is non-script sans serif. The font differs from the font of the first logo because it is rounded. The colors are orange, yellow and white: all warm colors. An illustration completes the text: handprints in different colors forming a circle. The contours of the illustration are irregular and give the impression of texture.

We will now look at the signifieds that might have been produced by these two logos as suggested by the literatures in semiotics, graphic design and art history.

In logo 1, the signifier green is today strongly associated with signifieds of nature, ecology and the environment (Cavassilas, 2007; Pastoureau, 2013). When associated with the word “care,” this color may activate a signified of protecting the environment. In addition, the association of green and white suggests pharmacies and, by extension, healthcare (Pastoureau, 2013). Thus, when these two colors are associated with the word “care,” they might activate a signified of medical care or health protection. We should also note that the uppercase letters in thick boldface, when associated with the word “care,” can be signifiers that activate the signified of alarm or urgency (Garfield, 2010). Depending on what the colors activate in the receivers – a signified of the environment or of health – the logo can signify an urgent need to defend the environment or to provide healthcare. As we have seen, the font is part of the stencil family (Alessandrini, 1979, 1980). Traditionally, these fonts were part of a marking system used in the military to label ammunition and food crates (Blackwell, 2004), and they remain typical of the military sector to this day. The stencil fonts are also used to mark the jute sacks for transporting coffee beans, for example, and they therefore also evoke the transportation of raw
materials (Heller & Vienne, 2012). The fonts of the stencil family usually look rustic and masculine, and in the case of logo 1, masculinity is reinforced by the thick boldface and overall rectangular shape. It should also be noted that the rectangular appearance, the use of cold colors and the absence of any illustration communicate seriousness. This impression is further strengthened by the regular contours of the logo. In terms of the double anchorage effect, it is likely that in logo 1 the word “care” evokes signifieds like “an emergency to protect the environment” or as “an emergency to protect the health of people.” Table 1 summarizes the semiotic analysis of logo 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signifiers</th>
<th>Signifieds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colors</td>
<td>Green and white, Cool colors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typography</td>
<td>Stencil typeface, Uppercase letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustration</td>
<td>No illustration apart from two rectangular bars framing the logo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>No texture, regular contours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shape</td>
<td>Rectangular</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In logo 2, the warm colors, yellow and orange, may communicate signifieds of warmth and friendliness. These colors may also signify countries of the southern hemisphere, especially African countries (Cavassilas, 2007). The use of two colors in association with handprints suggests the idea of diversity and social mixing. Lowercase letters should imply the signified of CARE’s proximity to its target public (Blanchard, 1980, 1998). Thus, the combination of lowercase letters, rounded shapes and warm colors should reinforce the signified of friendliness and communicate a warm and accessible brand image. The illustration suggests many possible signifieds, in fact. The hands forming a circle convey a signified of solidarity and mutual aid (international or inter-ethnic). The handprints suggest childhood and play. The circle may refer to the earth and thus to the organization’s international dimension. This shape, associated with the hands of children, also suggests maternity (Cavassilas, 2007). The irregular contours and the impression of texture produced by the handprints further reinforce the impression of friendliness and warmth through the illusion of a handmade visual, in opposition logo 1, which has a far more mechanical appearance. The combination of colors, typography and illustration in logo 2 seems designed to activate a signified of the word “care” that is gentler and warmer and certainly less alarmist than in logo 1. In terms of the double anchorage effect, it is likely that in logo 2 the word “care” evokes a signified of “caring for the people from
the southern hemisphere” or “caring for children all over the world.” Table 2 summarizes the semiotic analysis of logo 2.
Table 2  **Semiotic analysis of logo 2.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signifiers</th>
<th>Signifieds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Colors</strong></td>
<td>Orange, yellow and white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Warm colors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Typography</strong></td>
<td>Non-script, sans serif, rounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lowercase letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Illustration</strong></td>
<td>Different colored handprints forming a circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Texture</strong></td>
<td>Textured, irregular contours (hands)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shape</strong></td>
<td>Rounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friendliness, human warmth, diversity, southern countries, Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proximity, friendliness, sympathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Solidarity, mutual help, social diversity, childhood, play, maternity, earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;&gt; international solidarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>handmade &gt;&gt; warm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friendliness, sympathy, femininity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Results of the study of perceptions of the two logos**

In the second step of this research, we compared the findings from the semiotic study with the results of an experiment to determine the perceptions of the logos. In this second study, the findings of the semiotic analysis were very much confirmed (Table 3 and Figure 5). The lexical analysis of the responses on the free word association task showed that our respondents for the most part associated logo 1 with protection of the environment or healthcare. Logo 2 evoked ideas of solidarity, diversity, humanitarian action and childhood. Also, the study of the textual content of logos 1 and 2 seemed to support the notion of a double anchorage effect. Although the textual content was the same, in logo 1 the word “care” evoked sharper and more alarmist meanings, with a higher frequency for the word groups “protection, defense, preservation”; “attention”; and “safety, danger, prevention, emergency.” Logo 1 had a “serious” image – “strict” and even “cold” – and evoked a more masculine universe than logo 2 (“transportation, logistics”; “industry, works, construction”; and “army, military, soldier”).
Table 3  Results of the analysis of lexical content with Sphinx Quali.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ecology, nature, environment</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>Aid, solidarity, assistance</td>
<td>64.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health, medicine, pharmacy</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>Humanitarian action, charity</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection, defense</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>Union, together, team</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aid, solidarity, assistance</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seriousness, strictness, rigor</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>World, planet, earth</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian action, charity</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danger, emergency</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>Care</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport, logistics, stamp</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>Warmth</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>Protection, defense</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>Health, medicine, pharmacy</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry, works, construction</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>Fraternal</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple, sober, basic</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World, planet, earth</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>People</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army, military, soldier</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>Poor, disadvantaged</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>Attention</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of the nonprofit brand image scale from Michel and Rieunier (2013) also supported the conclusions of the semiotic study (Figure 5). Logo 1 scored high on the item related to the impression of seriousness but also suggested an organization perceived as not very sympathetic, generous or warm. In contrast, logo 2 scored high on items related to sympathy, generosity and friendliness. Yet this perception was not incompatible with an image of seriousness, as logo 2 scored close to logo 1 on this item.
Discussion and conclusion

This research enriches theory about graphic design and brand communication in several ways.

First, it proposes a conceptual and theoretical framework derived from semiotics that should lead to deeper insights into brand communication. This framework enables the simultaneous study of textual and visual content and takes into account the possible interactions between these different types of “signifiers.” By doing so, this framework provides a truly holistic approach (Henderson & Cote, 1998; Henderson et al., 2003; Orth & Malkewitz, 2008) and can be used by other researchers to analyze and test other logos or other kinds of visual materials used by brands to communicate their identity.

Second, it provides empirical evidence that the semiotic approach helps marketing managers to anticipate the associations of ideas generated by a graphic design in the minds of consumers. It thus demonstrates that semiotics offers a methodological approach that marketing managers can use to optimize their communication media. In this respect, it responds to a direction of research identified by Mick et al. (2004). It also offers an interesting alternative to the holistic but purely empirical approach proposed by Henderson et al. (1998, 2003, 2004) and replicated by Orth and Malkewitz (2008), and to the analytical approaches wherein some design elements (like colors or typefaces) are manipulated independently during experiments. As it includes an experiment on a less often studied communication medium (the logo and not packaging), it also reinforces the external validity of the conclusions drawn by Ares et al. (2011) and Piqueras-Fiszman et al. (2011).

Third, this research also extends semiotic theory by describing and confirming the phenomenon of double anchorage: we show that the interaction of a logo’s textual content and visual aspect is likely to modify the meaning of the transcribed text. This in
turn supports the notion that the two levels of meaning in typography are not independent but interact. This finding should be of strong managerial interest as it highlights the importance of taking into account the denoted and connoted meanings of a brand’s name when designing a logo. As it is still frequent to observe logos whose graphic design is not relevant to the brand identity – especially among small businesses or start-ups – this article should interest entrepreneurs as much as marketing managers. It highlights the variables that should be taken into account when designing a logo, proposes a methodology for analyzing the meanings that a logo is likely to generate, and demonstrates that this methodology is efficient.

Last, this text presents the “stencils,” a typeface family from the typographer Jean Alessandrini’s (1979, 1980) classification. To our knowledge, this family has never been presented in the marketing literature. It is missing from the classification proposed by McCarthy and Motherbaugh (2002) and the work of Hagtvedt (2011) on “incomplete” typefaces. This illustrates that marketing researchers would gain much from greater familiarity with the literature on graphic design. For example, familiarity with the history of stencil fonts helps to understand why using an “incomplete” typeface does not necessarily convey an image of modernity or innovativeness (Alessandrini, 1979, 1980; Blackwell, 2004; Heller and Vienne, 2012).

This study also presents some limitations. Choosing real logos instead of stimuli specifically designed for the experiment increased the external validity of the research but decreased its internal validity. Notably, the fact that logo 1 did not present any figurative imagery compared with logo 2 made it impossible to determine whether the associations of ideas observed for the two logos were produced by changes in typography, colors or imagery. Therefore, a direction for future research would be to replicate this study using ad hoc stimuli in which variables other than typography are controlled (i.e., two black and white versions of a logo differing only by their typography, as in Figure 3).

References


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**About the Author**

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